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Love Laughs Last

S. G. TALLENTYRE

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Chas. P. Putman,

LOVE LAUGHS LAST

S. G. TALLENTYRE

**'Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître,
Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être.'**

LOVE LAUGHS LAST

BY

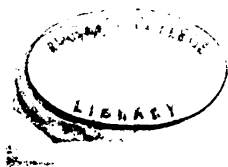
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LOVE LAUGHS LAST

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CHAPTER I

PARENTS

IN the month of May, in the year 1807, the recent death of Mr. Pitt, the present illness of Mr. Fox, and every one of the soul-shaking events of the French War, including Trafalgar and Austerlitz, were wholly set aside and at nought for the snug little village of Tottenham by the domestic, personal, and therefore much more exciting excitement of the elopement of dour, one-armed Captain King, R.N., of Tottenham High Street, with Camilla, sole daughter and heiress of Philip Forrest, Esquire, of Cedar Lodge, Edmonton.

Captain King, who had thoroughly learnt his business by incessant cruising and commanding prizes in the American War, which it had pleased Providence, or the devil, to begin simultaneously with his own career as a sailor, had lost an arm at the capture of Minorca and the three French frigates in 1798. Being thus compelled to leave the Service, he had bought that plain and practical house—in build not unlike himself—which, sadly changed, still stands in Tottenham High Street, and which, a hundred years ago, had a neat garden in front of it, a fat bow-window to its upstairs parlour, and a handsome brass knocker—representing a dolphin and breathing furrin' parts and ports—on its trim front door.

Everything was trim and ship-shape about the Gables so soon as it became the Captain's. He rose at the most unhalloed hours of a morning, and carpentered so audibly in his basement, where he had set up a small workshop, that his

sole servant, Susan, perforce became an early riser too, served his frugal meals like clockwork, and kept his house—with his firm, penetrating eye upon every object and corner in it—as clean as the decks of the “Camilla.”

The “Camilla” had been, so to speak, his first love—a fine frigate whose duty had been to convoy trading vessels, and who had sailed like a witch and fought like a dragon, and been far dearer to her captain than the splendid 74-gunship he had led into action at Minorca. Anyhow, his sister—a sour maiden lady living at Plymouth—always used to say that he married his silly little wife for no better reason than that she was also called Camilla: and it was very literally true—for the wisest, as the simplest, of us is a fool over something—that Captain King had been first attracted to Camilla Forrest for her name’s sake.

Her father, Philip Forrest, was a retired wine-merchant and—the corollary was by no means a necessary one in those days—a gentleman also. He was a collector, too, of pictures, glass and china: Captain King’s acquaintance with him was based on a Nankin china jar which once stood in the bow-window of the Gables’ parlour, and, after, on a red velvet stand in the rich and solemn drawing-room at Cedar Lodge, Edmonton.

In that drawing-room, Camilla, who was a very slight, pretty creature—with her pale gold hair and her white skin—lay nearly all day on a stiff sofa, with a wool-worked cushion at the back of her little head, and enjoyed delicate health.

Florence Nightingale used to say that a drawing-room was the ruin of many a woman’s life: but it was rather that piece of furniture in it which Cowper hymned, and which, accompanied by a little table just the right height for her smelling-salts and embroidery, formed so effective a setting to the grace and fragility which, for coarsely robust and vigorous man, was supposed to have the attraction of opposites.

Captain King certainly fell so many fathom deep in love

with Camilla that—though he was normally a sceptical person—he never seemed to question the *bona fides* of an ailment which kept her recumbent, except when she wanted to be perpendicular and walk round the garden with him, and which presently permitted her to carry out an elopement which involved rising at five o'clock in the morning, doing her own hair for the first time in her life, walking a wet half-mile in shoes obviously designed for any but that practical purpose, driving to London in an east wind and a post-chaise, and being married in a City church, weeping tears of damp down its walls. But, after all, Love is a most cunning physician: who cured Mrs. Browning of ailments less fanciful than Camilla's, and has endowed many a woman with an unsuspected strength of soul and body.

Before Henry King had yielded even once to a certain throttling temptation to kiss Camilla's sweet little flower-like face on its wool-worked cushion—before he had even taken her two thin, soft hands in his own thick, short one—he had spoken up to her father like the man he was.

Directly she had left the dining-room after dinner on that particular afternoon, before even his excellent port had had time to mellow his host, the guest, who was no strategist, had boldly and briefly asked for Camilla's hand, and stated with a steady and quiet assurance that he believed he had her heart.

It was February, so the curtains were drawn, and the fire and candle-light made ruddy the large, heavy dining-room, with its silver shining on the polished mahogany of the table, and lit up even the dark flock wall-paper on which, above the sideboard, hung a little Murillo—the picture of a peasant saint, rich in colour and full of bold and vigorous life—the gem of the house, and cheapening all its other treasures.

Forrest was a fine-looking man, with penetrating jet-black eyes which suggested a foreign ancestry; and perhaps his taste and *flair* for art came from forebears more cultivated

and aristocratic than a British wine-merchant in 1807 had any need of.

He poured himself out a glass of port and held it up to the light critically before he enquired ~~King's~~ King's financial position: and he had finished his glass, quite at leisure, before he looked straight into his guest's eyes, with a gleam of amusement in his own, and said, "But, my dear fellow, the thing's impossible——"

Henry King's mouth set in an obstinate line, and his firm hand fingered the cut wine-glass he did not refill.

"Camilla," Forrest went on, speaking pleasantly—for fate and men had yielded to him so often in the course of his easy life that he made quite sure they were going to yield now—"has no money of her own: and I should not, of course, make her any allowance if she married—unsuitably. In short, my dear fellow, put the idea out of your mind—the thing's impossible."

King said shortly he did not expect or wish any money with his wife. People had been happy on four hundred a year before now—or, precisely, on three hundred and fifty, since fifty must still go regularly to Mary-Ann King at Plymouth—in correction of the fallacy entertained by Mary-Ann's father that a single woman can live on nothing.

Forrest kicked away a footstool beneath his feet as if he were disposing of his guest's arguments.

"Some people, of course," he said. "Camilla has been brought up to be useless and expensive: I should have thought you would have seen it. On four hundred a year the woman must help. Camilla wouldn't help, you know."

King said, "I'd rather she didn't. I'm idle, perforce, but I'm not useless"; and as Forrest's eye fell for the fraction of a second on the empty sleeve, King added, "His Majesty has no use for one arm, but if it can't make money it can save some, and anyhow it shall save her—from—bothering herself."

He spoke hoarsely, and his mouth was set in a tight and ugly line.

Impatient rather than annoyed, Forrest rose and began blowing out the candles on the table. "We'll ask her to give us a cup of tea in the drawing-room," he said. "And after that it'll be better, as you'll see for yourself, you should not come here for a while. Curse your love-making!" he added with a laugh. "I shall miss you, King."

In the drawing-room, Camilla's pretty hands were flitting over the delicate appointments of the tea-table. She and her father kept up a conversation into which King hardly put a word, as they all drank their tea. Then, as he set down his cup on her tray, he said suddenly in an arresting voice, "Camilla!"

Camilla—he had never so called her before—stopped suddenly with a cup in her hand, and looked at him out of startled eyes.

"I have been asking your father's permission," Henry King said in the rough voice which conceals emotion, "to pay you my addresses" (they were still addresses in 1807), "and I want to know if you care for me enough to marry me on four hundred a year?"

And Camilla, staring at him, bewildered, for a moment, came straight to him like an arrow shot out of a bow, held his empty sleeve with both her hands, and, looking at her father round that protecting screen, said in a shaking voice, "I do, papa! indeed I do!"

Forrest was angry, but still not very angry. He said, as one argues with a child, "My dear Camilla, you have not the least idea of the purchasing power of four hundred pounds, or of four thousand, or of forty thousand" (which was perfectly true). "Young women like you always despise money simply because they have always had too much of it and have not imagination enough to know what it is like to have too little." (Also perfectly true.) "Try and think of yourself with small children, a general servant and a turned gown.

For I may as well tell you—as I have told King—that if you do marry him it will be literally that four hundred, for you will never have a sixpence from me in my lifetime, and all I have will go at my death to your cousin Archibald—who will be immensely obliged to you.”

He kicked a coal in the fire with the toe of his well-cut boot. He was still not really angry; only getting so.

Camilla disliked Archibald—a delicate, wizened young man, much occupied with his digestion. But she said, still holding on to Henry’s sleeve, and in a trembling voice, “I can’t help it, papa! I shall never be happy with anyone but Henry!”

And Forrest said, “Stuff and nonsense!” and kicked the coal again.

Then King undid Camilla’s little clinging hands with his only one, and faced her.

“It’s giving up a great deal, Camilla,” he said. “Your father is right there. I don’t suppose you do realise what it means not to have everything you want. But if you care for me enough to make the sacrifice, it shan’t be my fault if you repent it. You had better think it over and decide.” And on his plain face were the deep lines carved, often in a moment, by a strong emotion.

Then Camilla rose to the great moment of her life, and, looking up, said firmly, though her voice still shook, “I *have* decided, Henry: I shall come when you send for me.”

Thoroughly roused at last, her father turned sharply on her. “Go to your room, Camilla!” he said: and from the hearthrug the two men watched her go.

The next six weeks were, in not a few respects, to Henry King some of the most distasteful of his life. A fight he liked—he had enough Scots blood in him for that—and fighting had been the business of his youth. But subterfuge and ropeladders, white lies and the bribing of servants, getting surreptitiously out of windows instead of walking honestly out of

doors, were in the highest degree obnoxious to him. He had refused Forrest his parole, and therefore might have held himself morally free to write to Camilla and to see her when he had a chance, but—no doubt because he was so very little of either—he could never rid himself of the sensation of being a knave and a serpent when he tipped Forrest's groom to convey a letter, or met a trembling little figure in a cloak in a dripping shrubbery when Forrest was dining with the Cloth-workers, and the cousin, hired to play duenna, was in bed with a headache. Camilla used to persuade the cousin—who was a sentimental old fool—to develop the headache whenever Forrest was away for an evening—a deed King could hardly have perpetrated to save his life. Even when, in that dank shrubbery, he drew a warm, soft little person close to him with his one most efficient arm, the sensation of being a cheat and a traitor was still paramount; and Camilla, half laughing and half crying, saying, "You must let me just *breathe*, Henry!" was far the happier of the two. She had suffered all her life from the cruellest of ennui—the satiety of competence: all the ripe plums had dropped into her lap without her ever having to reach out a hand to gather them: and she was not only in love with Henry, but alive, through him, for the first time: loved the action and excitement of all the surreptitious arrangements, and would have been sentimentally disappointed if her father—like a parent in one of those Minerva Press novels (which had been, alas! her only mental nutrition)—had as yet yielded with the inevitable "Bless you, my children! All is forgiven, and here is five thousand a year."

Instead, there was a misty May morning, with the young grass twinkling with dewdrops and the sun uncertain if he should, or should not, creep gold through the grey, and Camilla, with a cloak about her slimness and an agitated face in a deep poke bonnet and absurd feet in the satin shoes, clinging on to Henry's sound arm as he hurried her through the garden and the copse to the chaise waiting in the lane, and

murmuring—really afraid and really enjoying herself—"Oh, Henry, Henry!—*suppose* papa catches us!"

Papa was sound asleep until long after their chaise had driven through the flowering lanes and between the fields, then ripening for hay-making, which divided Edmonton from London: and it was so early when Henry King—still feeling a thief and keenly resenting the sensation—helped Camilla to alight outside a church in the City, that that City still smelt of the clean, chill freshness of the dawn.

The church—to be precise, it was St. Dunstan's-in-the-East, with its white and fairy spire revealing its whereabouts among the drab dwelling and business houses which enclosed it—had been especially selected by Henry King on account of the remarkable unintelligibility of the curate as a caller of banns—King having taken a room in Water Lane so as to be Bachelor of this Parish and of no other.

Now, the curate mumbled through the service as rapidly as might be; the clerk looked as if his whole morning toilette had been a shake, like a dog's; and the frowsy pew-opener—in a few City churches a perfect reproduction of that dreary old woman, with the same sniff and the same black shawl and the same tendency to address anyone female, looking the least good-natured, as "dear," is still to be found—kissed poor Camilla in the vestry and shed a bleary tear.

There was to be no wedding-trip. Camilla was quite in love with the prospect of real poverty and economies—as a little girl delightedly provisions a doll's house on crumbs. All the way back to Tottenham her newly-ringed hand lay in Henry's strong one.

As they drove past the old High Cross—the gardens of the comfortable houses were rich in golden showering laburnums and great copper beech in young, soft leaf—Camilla turned to her husband with a contented sigh.

"It looks so much prettier to-day than on ordinary days!" she said.

And, indeed, the sun was melting the early mists, and, for the first time, some of King's uneasiness and gravity.

When they reached home, in the little bow-fronted parlour—where had once stood the Nankin jar, responsible for everything—there lay a letter on the gate-legged table.

"That came for you, ma'am, half an hour ago," says Susan, apprising the bride.

When Susan had gone, Camilla read it, and then—Henry having already removed her straw bonnet with its white ribbons—leant her fair head against his shoulder and cried a little.

"Poor papa!" she said. "But I *think* he will come round; don't you, Henry?"

King did not answer. He knew very well that your blusterer may be persuaded; or, still more likely, when convenient, may persuade himself. Forrest's letter began, My dear Camilla; ended, Your affectionate father; and dealt in no heroics. But it pointed out, in temperate language, that, Camilla having chosen her own way, that way and her father's would lie apart.

It was only natural that the two perfectly ordinary persons who became, in due course, David's parents should not escape the fate of the majority: nor, after the exquisite delights of the honeymoon had become nature's daily food, the rubs and jars of settling into place.

It is undoubtedly true, for instance, that when the inability to buy whatever she wanted, directly she wanted it, ceased to be a novelty and amusement, Camilla's ignorance of money matters was a trial to her husband. When he remarked that his balance at the bank was low and it behoved them to be careful, she said persuasively, "Oh, Henry dear, then why not belong to another bank?" And it took patience and explanation to convince her that a pass-book is not a free pass to the entire capital a bank possesses.

But if she was not wise, and had been most lamentably

ill-educated, she was not without those instincts of the heart which teach the head: she was sweet-tempered as well as very affectionate: while her ignorance of things domestic certainly had its advantages. Susan, who, in point of fact, had been preparing to make herself thoroughly disagreeable and to give a rudely dramatic Notice, directly She—meaning the bride—came and poked her nose into My Kitchen, became quite fond of a mistress who never poked into anything: and encouraged her in what may be called fine-ladyism by persuading her to breakfast in bed in any domestic crisis—such as the sweep in the kitchen—saying, “Don’t you worry, mum! I’ll see to him.”

Camilla did not, in fact, worry. It was still King who marched smartly into the larder on the exact stroke of eight-thirty every morning to command Susan to convert the cold mutton into sea-pie: his brisk, direct eyes still spied the dust to which the masculine vision is usually blind: he continued to carpenter at seven and to do the garden—a narrow strip of a garden between old red walls—with varying success, entirely himself.

The prize contents of her father’s hot-houses and his glaring flower-beds had left Camilla perfectly cold, but when Henry brought up to the parlour two peaches, as white and hard as peeled potatoes, from one of his new trees, she not only devoutly admired his genius as a horticulturist, but went to the extreme length of eating a peach and finding it delicious: and when, in the following spring, with her slender arm through his, he took her to see the two diseased crocuses which, for reasons known only to themselves, had elected to appear out of at least three dozen planted, she was quite genuinely enchanted, clasped Henry’s arm a little closer, and said, “They’re *lovely*, Henry!” and meant it.

One September afternoon, when they were out blackberrying in a bye-lane near Stamford Hill—Camilla with the basket in the road, and Henry with the thorns in the hedge—lo! a horseman: and before she had time to realise the situa-

tion and to think what to do, her father had passed her, lifting his hat with a civil inclination of the head, as to an acquaintance. Near neighbours as they were, they had not chanced to meet face to face since that night before her wedding when a trembling and guilty Camilla had kissed him good-night: and Henry had not been able to cure her of the sentimental delusion that when they did see each other they would certainly fall on each other's necks in eternal reconciliation.

Going home, King did his best to stiffen her moral backbone with his own pride and obstinacy: in some degree succeeded: and, as he measured out the sal volatile as she lay presently on the sofa, knew that it was not all pain to her to cry a little as she softly stroked his cheek: that the father who had treated her as his most valuable bric-à-brac was nothing to her beside the Prince—glum, middle-aged and precise though he was—who had kissed her into a living woman.

As for himself, he knew that he had much, and was thankful. Yet sometimes—turning his flower-beds—visions of his old life came between him and the red walls of the garden—not of those pleasant three years, in the breathing space of peace which had begun in the spring of '83 and which he had spent on quiet service cruising in the Mediterranean on a sea as blue as the Italian day above it, but the life of action, vigour, responsibility, aboard the "Camilla" in the American War, continually facing storm and stress, danger and difficulty. For so are we made that few of us are fully happy unless we are using the powers of the brain to the utmost; and the task that is easy is always unsatisfying.

To be sure, Henry King's present task was not all smooth sailing. He was commander, autocrat, lord paramount at the Gables as aboard his ship, and meant to be. When Camilla, favoured or afflicted by a morning call from three lady visitors who, arriving at eleven, showed no signs of departure at noon, sent for King, digging potatoes, to share their society, he returned so fierce a refusal by Susan that she judged

the only way to convey it to her mistress was by coughing significantly at the parlour door, catching Camilla's eye above the guests' bonnets, and framing silently with her lips the words, "He says he's damned if he do."

That evening, while Camilla tearfully needle-worked a little shirt on the sofa, King, whose only reading was the newspaper, took one of the fat, dull volumes, visibly solely ornamental, from the tall book-case, and read it firmly, not uttering a sound for three hours.

At ten, Camilla was asking to be forgiven, kneeling by his side with her head on his shoulder. All his grimness relaxed as he stroked her fair hair silently with his heavy forefinger: but it was understood between them, henceforth and for ever more, that Henry was to dig the potatoes unmolested, and would never, under any possible concatenation of circumstances, be a tame cat in a parlour, soothing the susceptibilities of stout ladies with sherry.

Presently, he was making a wooden cradle in his workshop for the reception of David—a cradle very much like Dean Swift's, now preserved—surely a strange nursery—in a church in Sussex.

Sitting together over the fire in the old beamed parlour, lit by the tall candles in King's only pair of silver candlesticks, in those evenings of their first winter—Camilla stitching at David's trousseau, while King now and again read aloud a paragraph from his newspaper—they knew some of the happiest hours of their lives.

At one such time, towards Christmas, King produced paper, quill, and ink to send that quarterly twelve pound ten to his sister Mary-Ann at Plymouth. Perhaps Camilla—though she was more generous in money matters than women commonly are—would have resented that payment from their small income if she had not now fully persuaded herself that her father was really only waiting to forgive her until that announcement, "On —th instant, at the Gables, Tottenham, Middlesex, the lady of Captain Henry King, R.N., of a

son," duly appeared in "The Times," when he would instantly repent, relent, and endow the infant with a thousand or a hundred thousand pounds (the sums being practically identical in the mind of Camilla) on the spot.

She propounded this romantic vision to Henry, letting her slender hands fall on the work in her lap, with her cheeks a little flushed and her pretty eyes shining.

"He *must*, you know, Henry!" she said. "Papa isn't a *Brute*."

King smiled his slow and difficult smile, and leant forward and held her hand as he said, "Don't delude yourself, my dear. That's always the end of the story in 'The Ladies' Magazine.'" (Some back numbers of that periodical, with its illuminating sub-title of "Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex appropriated solely to their Use and Amusement," lay at the moment by Camilla's work-box.) "But, I assure you, in real life it's most uncommon: and you'll have to make up your mind to—me and poverty, I expect, to the end of the chapter."

But Camilla, incurably romantic, with her eyes on the fire, murmured dubiously, "Yet I so often hear an Inner Voice, Henry dear, telling me papa will forgive everything."

King's hand left hers, and the smile died away from his face. "Then don't listen to it," he said sternly. "As far as I am concerned, your father can keep his money and his forgiveness: and I don't think people get much enjoyment out of luxuries they don't earn. If you want them, you shouldn't have married me." And his plain face was hard with the hardness which cloaks trouble.

Camilla's arms were round his neck in a second and her cottons and thimble rolling on the floor: and she rubbed her cheek against his and reiterated, with tears, that she was more than happy, and wanted only Henry—and David—in all the world. Then, recovering herself—while King recovered the cottons—and with a smile coming on her face like a delicate rainbow in a wet spring sky, she said, "And it is

very uninteresting to have everything you want! *How* I used to yawn and wish time would go quicker at Cedar Lodge: and here there's always something—wants mending!" And she put a light hand on the pile of work at her side.

The dreadful Gamp of the period—a fat creature in a monstrosity of a cap, voluble, ignorant exceedingly, and whom King hated with a hatred so acute that it penetrated even her understanding—presently arrived to endanger not only Camilla's physical safety, but to revive in her that obstinate delusion that one can both eat one's cake and have it, and that Mr. Forrest, mum, *he* won't see you and the little dear want for nothing he can give you. But Camilla, fortunately, was under a stronger influence, and had, besides, at the moment the pre-occupation of trying to prevent Henry turning Mrs. Bunt suddenly at any minute out of the house, bag and baggage—an effort which would hardly have succeeded if King had not darkly and rightly suspected that all Mrs. Bunts were tarred with the same brush, and that a change would not be a difference.

Then, in April—that season of new beginnings, with young life bleating in the meadow and twittering in the hedge, with little soft shoots pushing up through the old brown earth even in a garden gardened entirely by Henry—David, his son, opened his eyes on the world.

CHAPTER II

THE FATHER OF THE MAN

THE first storm in the life voyage of David Henry Philip Forrest King—for this, at his mother's wish, was his absurdly comprehensive nomenclature—was occasioned by the visit to the Gables of his aunt and godmother-by-proxy, Mary-Ann of Plymouth.

David was then six months old, sturdy, serene, blue-eyed and perfectly good tempered: hauled about since the departure of Mrs. Bunt by a devoted nurse-girl, Jane, an excellent child of twelve, with a short frock and a long apron, and not much more ignorant of the right treatment of infants than her employers, or the rest of the world at the epoch.

When, indeed, there was anything in that treatment so markedly unhygienic as to cause him discomfort, the red crept slowly through David's fair skin and the thin veil of fair hair which imperfectly covered his head, and he roared vigorous protest. But, as a rule, when Jane dropped him, which she did more than once, he seemed to come back to shape again immediately like an india-rubber ball: he lay for hours in Dean Swift's cradle, agreeably engaged in trying to catch a sunbeam, or, a little later on, sat in the garden, hemmed in by a bar in a sort of wooden go-cart his father had made him, watching Nature and that father at their natural work.

Of the false shame of the ordinary man, which causes him to pretend that his infants, being infants, can have no interest for him, King had not a trace. He was as skilful, with

his sailor's one hand, with his son's strings and hooks as any two-handed woman: convoyed David's stout and indefinite person as if it had been a small sack of potatoes, but to David's complete satisfaction; while, when his father issued the word of command, David, even at the crawling stage, obeyed it by shuffling along the floor with a celerity perfectly amazing, and not achieved by less well disciplined infants with legs in full working order.

As for Camilla, her first and only maternity blurred for ever the delicacy of her porcelain prettiness: she was less ethereal and more human: something wiser, and Camilla still.

Mary-Ann King—she was not a foolish woman, and ought to have known how rash is he (only, it is always she) who long thrusts her company on any young couple—arrived with six boxes, a parrot, a carpet bag, and a brass-bound hair-trunk containing her silver teaspoons and teapot, and her Will, lest she should elect to die or alter it before her return.

She was a gaunt woman of forty, not unlike her brother in uncompromisingness and sound goodness of character, and all might have gone well, had she not taken it into her head to adore David with the full strength of her friendless heart—at the same time feeling herself past mistress of the Art (so mysteriously vouchsafed to all spinsters and bachelors, and withheld from all parents) of the Perfect Management of Children, in body, soul and spirit.

So, when David was seated in the garden in his small settee with a rail, Mary-Ann, feeling he was catching cold, hastened out and bound him round and round in yards of comforter.

Henry King, from the vegetable bed, said ominously, "You had better leave that child alone, Mary-Ann!"

Mary-Ann replied, "Are you aware, Henry, there is a distinct touch of east in the wind?"

And Camilla tried to accommodate both parties by slightly

loosening the bands in which the good-natured David had suffered himself to be trussed, and saying timidly, "Henry is *quite* a Spartan about babies, Mary-Ann!"

The next day Mary-Ann informed Camilla she was hurrying David to an early grave by bathing him in water, tepid instead of warm: Camilla, half-believing, wept: and King, finding her on the sofa with the smelling salts, inspired her with so much fight and independence that she rose up and put David to bed half an hour earlier than usual, thus meanly and intentionally depriving his godmother of the greatest pleasure of her life—seeing him enjoy the greatest pleasure in his, splashing his audience with soapy water from his bath.

That night, Miss King retired to bed with a crushing calm at nine. When she was well out of the room, Henry growled, "When is that woman going?" To which Camilla replied, "I don't know, Henry, dear; but she has brought her *winter* bonnet"—an ominous sign indeed in a visitor arriving in August.

The next day the three who, after all, loved each other well and David better, made up their differences: Mary-Ann, with her absurd Will altered in her godson's favour, eventually left sooner than the bonnet predicted: and though she had imperfectly concealed her opinion that Henry had made a fool of himself in his marriage, Camilla sat down instantly and wrote her a re-crossed and genuinely affectionate letter: while King saw to it that his son was brought up in a faith he never lost in his godmother's generosity and devotion.

David's earliest recollection, or one of his earliest, was of a little model of a ship, which stood in a glass case on a small polished table in the Gables' narrow hall. His chin, as he stood beside it in his nankeen frock, just reached that table, and left on its polish a dull mark which, with similar marks left by his small, stout hands, he remembered Susan, who was getting fussy, rubbing away briskly with a cloth. When he was extraordinarily and unexpectedly good of

a Sunday afternoon the ship, without its shade, was brought up to the parlour: David, sitting on his father's knee, had its component parts explained to him, and heroically resisted—for that was forbidden—reaching out to touch them: and he had some vague vision of his mother, in her light gown, kneeling by his side with one arm about him, and the other supplementing his father's lack. For a long time David thought all fathers were born with one arm and an empty sleeve, and then was interested (but only mildly) in how *his* father's came to be missing.

War, and the figure of the great Little Corporal, dominated Europe in David's childhood, and touched it hardly more than it touches Miss Austen's novels: but he did recollect that when Susan, in her low, pleasant kitchen looking on to the High Street, had popped a delicacy into his mouth (open like a bird's to receive it, as he stood by her side as she rolled and patted and shaped), she would say, "Now you be off, Master Davie, or I'll send for old Mr. Boney": while Jane employed the conqueror of Austerlitz as a sleeping draught by stating when she found David awake in his crib after the appointed hour that if he wasn't asleep in two twos old Boney'd come down the chimbley to know the reason why. Whereupon David—being a perfectly healthy child in brain and body, and not at all timid—presently growing tired of waiting to see Mr. Boney effect this remarkable entry, slept sound, with his thumb in his innocent mouth.

This was the epoch when little boys were frequently sent to boarding school at the tender age of three; when the scion of a noble house had to take to his bed for a week, so sore and bruised was his body from a beating administered for the good of his soul by his own father; and when nearly all parents made a point and a principle of giving their children what they disliked, because they disliked it.

Henry King had not only first lived under, and then administered, a stern and sometimes a brutal discipline, but was himself narrow and severe by nature: and though he loved

David as a man of few and profound affections can love an only son, the discipline of that young gentleman's youth was far from lax.

Perfectly good-tempered, David was of a fine obstinacy or determination of character, and was not four years old when one day after dinner he took it into his infant head to decline to say his grace.

Camilla said, "Now, now, Davie, dear!" entreatingly; and Davie dear looked up at her with his roguish eyes and uttered not a word.

King threw a glance at her which bade her go up to the parlour, himself took the newspaper, and said to his young gentleman, "I shall wait here till you have said your grace."

He waited for two hours without a sound in the room save the crackle of the little news-sheet and the dropping of the ashes from the fire.

Then, and not till then, David, beaten, hammered his young toes violently against the table, broke out with an angry thanksgiving between loud sobs, was well smacked, and carried, kicking vigorously, to bed. The howls from upstairs were audible for so long that Camilla, on the feeble feint of fetching her scissors, crept up, put her soft face against poor David's swollen countenance, and inserted a comforting bull's-eye into his mouth.

Fibs had seemed to her entirely venial in her girlhood—the natural weapon of the weak—but she had not lived for five years with Henry King and wholly escaped the contagion of his rigid truthfulness.

She owned her weakness and wept, with her fingers propitiatingly caressing, as usual, that dangling sleeve, and King said in his grave tones, "You are wrong, Camilla. There is only one alternative on his Majesty's ships—Duty or Mutiny, and here with the boy it's got to be one or the other."

And poor Camilla laid her lips on the sleeve and said, rather doubtfully, "Oh yes, Henry, dear, I know—I know."

David must have been six years old—promoted now from

the nankeen frock to little trousers of the same material, white stockings coming beneath them, and a turned-over frill to his shirt collar—when he began having the Latin grammar, in Latin, thrashed into him at an Academy for Young Gentlemen on Tottenham Green, and on Sunday mornings attended with them (all clad in their primmest best, looking as if butter would not melt in their mouths and as if they had never heard of that vulgar instrument of torture, called a cane) at the parish church of All Hallows.

David at this period, with his straight, light hair rather long and his fair, open, wholesome face rather freckled, his honest eyes and his wide and steady mouth, was quite an ordinary-looking little boy. The Rev. Andrew Pilmer, his master, found his brain power also ordinary. But he had, all the same, qualities which for the good of the world might well be more ordinary than they are—great sweetness of temper, strong affection, perfect truthfulness of mind and a great independence of character.

At first, his mother insisted that Jane should daily escort him to school: when she had conducted him over the crossing near the High Cross, David, with an air of command to which the foolish Jane instantly succumbed, sent her back again, lest the possession of a nursery-maid should disgrace him in the eyes of his fellows.

The noonday hour, during which the Reverend Pilmer's young gentlemen were free of supervision and ate the light lunch they had brought with them, David generally spent with a young friend, Michael, who had a home and an apple-tree hard by: but Michael one day falling sick of the mumps, David quietly betakes himself to the little bun-shop near the Sanchez almshouses, seats himself on a chair at a little marble table, and having requested a glass of water and the newspaper (in imitation of an old gentleman in the corner), tranquilly consumes the sandwiches from his pocket; and having finished, withdraws, with a polite bow and a "Good morning, ma'am," as sole payment to the stout matron over the counter.

This cheap and excellent system he pursued daily, until, little Mike's jaws having assumed normal proportions, David once more ate with him beneath the apple-tree, which, if one heaved one's person violently enough against its trunk, sometimes shook down the apples one was strictly forbidden to pick.

One great and memorable day in his first term the retired stockbroker, Mr. Gilmour, who lived next door to the Gables and had before now handed David a plum or a pear over their dividing wall, lent Henry King his horse. King actually took a holiday for his son (Good Friday and Christmas Day were the only holidays given the luckless schoolboy in those stern times) and, with the child seated behind him on Robin, rode up to London.

But that was not all.

After his father had transacted some business in the City, David was taken by stage-coach to Chatham, where King visited an old friend in command of one of those "hells on water," the hulks in which the French prisoners of war were confined.

While King was recalling old days over a glass with his friend in his quarters, young David—exploring and quietly energetic of mind even now—roamed about the hulk by himself, and presently picked up the acquaintance of a young French sailor, a Marseillais, a mere boy, with great ear-rings in his ears, bright, black, eager eyes, and a body half famished and much more than half naked. The British Government's treatment of its captives was not indeed wilfully and calculatedly inhuman, but it permitted itself to be scandalously cheated in its contracts for food and lodging: personal humanity on the part of the ships' commanders could do little to alleviate the horribly insanitary conditions of the prisoners' quarters; and the prisoners, gamblers to a man, often played away the last rag on their backs.

Pierre—he knew a few words of English and was soon talking and gesticulating vehemently to little David—had

made, with true Gallic ingenuity and industry, a little model of a church from the bones saved from his rations, for which David presented him—not grudgingly, for he was a most generous child—with his whole worldly fortune, a shining half-crown, presented by Mr. Gilmour. Poor Pierre, emotional little Southerner that he was, and weakened by misery and privation, burst into tears and seized and kissed the child's hands.

As David and his father walked back the dismal two miles which separated the hulks from Chatham town, David was almost entirely silent.

Presently he said suddenly, in his young treble, "Father!"

King, recalling himself from some vision of old days, asked, "Well?"

"Isn't there enough food in England?"

"Enough and a little to spare," answered King, "so long as His Majesty's Navy keeps the seas."

"Why don't the prisoners have more to eat then?" asked David.

King replied rather sternly that they *were* prisoners, and that it was not to be expected they should be fed and pampered like Lord Mayors.

Only the day before David had seen that fairy, though not fairy-like, prince, the Lord Mayor, with his coachman, and the contrast between those portly worthies and the luckless Pierre jumped to the eyes even of a child. He pondered these things in his heart, and was a long while silent.

Presently—the two were passing what is now the Royal Naval Barracks, where stands, in tardy reparation, the monument erected to the memory of those very prisoners "laid in an honourable grave by a nation which knows how to respect valour and to sympathise with misfortune"—David looked up and asked, "Does it hurt to die of hunger?"

And King, immersed in other thoughts, and having quite forgotten their previous conversation, answered, "Why, of course it does: what's the boy thinking of?"

When, that evening, Camilla went up to kiss her son good night, she found him crying: with the obstinacy that was in his character he refused explanation, even to the point of incurring the unjust and derogatory suspicion of having over-tired or over-eaten himself.

It was after, but not long after, that unforgettable visit to the hulks that King took David one day to the London docks, and the boy saw, for the first time in his life, that strange, busy and variegated life; the black wharves, the foreign faces: here, a huge vessel seeking her berth; there, a great East Indiaman noisily unloading cargo. Father and son went aboard one fine ship, and David had the awful satisfaction of peering into the deep, dark hole. Presently, having something to do ashore, his father took the boy to the fo'castle and left him in charge of an old sailor, who, when he had refreshed himself with King's tip, returned, drawing his sleeve across his mouth, and answered the questions David had been accumulating in his absence. Perhaps the potations rather deepened the colouring of old Tim's stories of typhoons, cyclones, hurricanes, shipwrecks, desert islands and icebergs. The neat little figure in the clean jean trousers, with his freckled face and his steady eyes, listened with a profound attention; and when Tim's fellow sailor—a picturesque person, with his swarthy complexion, and a greasy pigtail tied by a much greasier ribbon, leaning against the porthole smoking a very short black pipe—said, "Go it, Tim!" with a short laugh, young David turned and looked at him with the full, calm, disconcerting gaze of youth and innocence.

That truthful eye did not hamper Tim, however; who went it, as advised.

That evening, at the Gables, Henry King produced for his son from the book-case with glass doors—where the books were so largely ornamental—the "Voyages of Captain Cook": and David, who had hitherto regarded reading as a task only, sat in a corner all the evening, wholly absorbed. The next day, in the garden, where David was digging his own par-

ticular plot near his father, King told him, with the difficult utterance of the taciturn man to whom speech is more useful for concealing than for expressing his thoughts, how in 1780 he had seen the "Resolution" and the "Discovery" lying at Sheerness with their flags flying half-mast, returned from Captain Cook's last voyage, and bringing with them the news of his murder by the savages of Owhyhee.

David, with the light summer wind stirring his hair, leant on his small spade, quite entranced. This was, as it were, romance at first hand. He soon knew Captain Cook's "Voyages" very nearly by heart. In the June evenings of that summer of Waterloo, his father sometimes took him a country walk and told him of his own experiences of the life that had been life indeed, and put in—or was it, rather, fed and nourished in his boy's heart a love inborn, but undeveloped—for that wonderful siren, the sea? King was no *raconteur*, much less an engaging liar, like Tim. He did not spare his son the knowledge of the price he would have to pay to follow the Briton's natural calling. A hard life, but the best there is, was the sum total of his experiences. The empty sleeve, which had been a curiosity—like the little ship on the hall table, or the cobbler's wooden leg—became for David a pride and a reverence.

Before he was eight years old he knew how to wash his own shirt and scrub the table in the workshop downstairs, was handy at carpentering (which was pure delight, it involved so much interesting bloodshed), and had been trained to immaculate neatness and simplicity not only of his small person but of the slip of a room where he slept. His father had further and thoroughly inculcated in him those invaluable lessons—the fewer possessions, the freer man; and that the clear and simple aim, and not the diversity of interests, makes for happiness in life as for success, which is not commonly obtained on easier terms.

Awe, respect and affection were what eight-year-old David felt for his father: but he did not doubt hereafter that

Shakespeare and that father were right in thinking that hardness is ever of hardiness the mother, and knew that he suffered less when he left home for having suffered a little in it.

As for poor Camilla, she had long accepted her son's future destiny. One afternoon, when he was hardly twelve months old, and seated on the floor banging about indiscriminately with his rattle, as she stroked his downy head with her forefinger, she had idly wondered aloud what he would be when he was a man.

"There's only one profession for him," says King—"Mine."

Camilla's caressing finger stopped: she looked up and exclaimed impulsively, "Oh, it's too dangerous, Henry!"

King replied almost sternly, "Danger's the spice in the pudding, my dear. Davie's going to be a sailor."

The idea which distressed her to tears at the moment soon became, under King's firm influence, so much a matter of course that she forgot at last that there had ever been a time when she had hoped Davie might turn into something quiescent, like a clergyman.

He was nine when he paid his second visit to the London docks, this time with Mr. Gilmour. Much like a puffy little cock sparrow was Mr. Gilmour, very neat with his black worsted stockings and his buckled shoes: monetarily of small fortune, but, as endowed with an absorbing passion for astronomy, virtually a rich man.

It was David's birthday; and it was at Mr. Gilmour's suggestion they celebrated it by going to see the lions in the Tower, and at David's own that they walked on afterwards to the docks, where they spent a long morning watching a great unlading of cargo, a wherry beating up against the wind, some Chinese sailors in their dirty blue, and a brigantine, going foreign. David had learnt enough from his father by now to detect that Mr. Gilmour knew very little of seafaring matters: but he was a modest youth, and the pos-

session of information never at any time possessed him with the desire to expose other persons' lack of it: only, as Mr. Gilmour's answers respecting the use and purpose of various ropes were unsatisfactory, David's questions took another direction.

"Why aren't you married, please, sir?" he said very politely, after a long meditation.

Mr. Gilmour silently considered the black hull of a ship for a few seconds before he replied, "Well, sometimes, you know, the only woman you would like to marry is married to some one else."

David considered. "What do you do then, sir?" he asked.

"Why, then you grin and bear it," replied Mr. Gilmour.

If Mr. Gilmour was bearing it, he certainly was grinning too. He endured with a praiseworthy equanimity, the dreadful dinner which, to please David, was taken among seafaring persons at a very vile little eating-shop on the quayside. When they reached home, and David had supped with him *en garçon*, the host completed a delightful day by taking his guest to his toy observatory on the roof, where David had the bliss of making each eye in turn ache severely by pressing it to the telescope, through which he never upon any occasion could recollect locating any one of the heavenly bodies, or seeing anything but cobalt ether waving up and down.

Sometimes, in one of those distressful winters of the peace without plenty that followed Waterloo, Mr. Gilmour would come and sit for an hour in that cosy parlour of the Gables, and discuss with King the disastrous condition of the farmer and the labouring classes; while Camilla, opposite, stitched tranquilly, with her fair curls shading her bent face, and David sat very upright on his chair by the table, with his young soul absorbed in his book—Captain Cook many times over, Defoe's "Plague of London," or a translation of the splendidly prophetic and imaginative lies of the Baron Münchhausen. No sitting on one foot, swinging the other, and

plunging into one's elders' conversation with shrill questions for the "human boy" then. When the grandfather clock in the corner struck eight, King, without turning his head, said, "Bed, David;" and David, not even waiting to reach a full stop, got down suddenly from his chair, put away his book, bade his elders good night, took his candle, and undressed in the darkness it faintly illuminated on a second floor of which he was the solitary occupant.

They were a happy trio—as Mr. Gilmour perhaps reflected as he returned to the stars alone. Camilla—who had long accepted the turned gown and the last year's bonnet quite philosophically, for it is not the prettiest women who are the vainest—was indeed, in all David's recollections of her, as throughout his life, prone to tears and unreasonableness; the while he always knew, at the back of his young mind, that his father liked in her the weakness and timidity he conscientiously tried to correct—as he knew that her two men were always to stand buffer and screen to her to protect her alike against the little shocks of daily life and the rude winds from heaven.

There was one particularly comfortable winter—it was a very *uncomfortable* one for England, with the Luddite riots firing the manufacturing districts, and everywhere the murmurs of a bitter discontent—of which David had particularly clear memories. Once, when he and his father were in the workshop, King spoke to the child definitely of his future: how he hoped, ways and means permitting, to put him into the finest service in the world, the British Navy; how failing that, David must go—the next best thing and no bad second—into the British Mercantile Marine, so that if he could not protect his country's shores from His Majesty's enemies in His Majesty's senior service, he must transport His Majesty's commerce, if need be, as need had been, in the teeth of those enemies and in the jaws of their guns.

David said "Yes, sir"; for the time forgot what his father

had said, being absorbed in the carpentering; and afterwards remembered.

In those winter evenings he was reading aloud to his parents the autobiography of an old merchant captain who had been a very game old dog in life, and was a very dull old dog on paper. As the reader still had to stop and spell out all the long words, and had been idiotically taught at school to announce the punctuation to prove he did not confuse colons with semi-colons, or both with commas, he had reason afterwards to think that his performance must have been an agonising one for his parents, who listened to him with perfect gravity, neither of them being remarkable for a keen sense of humour, as he sat on the edge of his straight-backed chair, with his white-stockinged legs dangling and the book held up high in front of him.

When his father said "That'll do, David," he got off his perch with inward glee and the solemnity of manner demanded of all well brought up little boys, and went to the table and absorbed his young soul in netting a net to protect the currant bushes. All his life long his memory held the picture of the fire-lit room, the silver candlesticks on the high mantelpiece, the red curtains drawn about the windows, and his parents with their chairs close together. Presently, when David looked up from his labours, he would see his mother lay her little hand on his father's knee, and his father's thick hand close upon hers; and when he was older and wiser he knew that that was a memory to be grateful for.

One day, early in the following autumn, as he came frisking back from school in the hot afternoon sunshine, Mr. Gilmour, standing with old Dick, his dog, at his gate, gravely signed to him to come in. The proceeding was not unusual, and David followed him down the brick path with his satchel of books swinging and Dick's moist nose against his hand.

Once in the parlour, Mr. Gilmour produced his bandana handkerchief and wiped his face, and David noticed it was

white, as if he were feeling the heat. Mr. Gilmour's parlour was in that state of agreeable muddle which betokens bachelor housekeeping: there were books, rather dusty, piled on the floor; a great litter of papers on the writing-table; and, on the mantelshef, a row of ripening apples. He selected one and gave it to David, who began munching at once. Then, as had happened before, Mr. Gilmour sought a half-crown in his pocket and put it into David's hand, saying, "Now you can go and buy that knife, Davie": and when David had thanked him, he put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Wait a minute, my boy," and cleared his throat.

David looked up at him, surprised: he was too young for presentiments: fate had always been kind.

"Now, Davie," said Mr. Gilmour, "you must be a man. I've some bad news for you—some very bad news. You must be a good boy and help your mother as your father would have liked. Your father's very ill"—David lifted his bewildered young eyes—"in fact, my dear boy, the truth of the matter is he's dead, and you and I have got to comfort your mother as best we can." And Mr. Gilmour blew his nose very loudly on the bandana handkerchief.

Strange, that what we call the knowledge of life usually begins with the realisation of death! The September sun was still shining hotly on the red brick path—where Dick, stretched at full length licking his paws, waved greeting with a lazy tail—as David and Mr. Gilmour went down it: the pretty old High Street was busy and cheerful as it had been when David came skipping down it ten minutes earlier, and the rooks were still cawing loudly in the trees in the gardens behind their high walls. But, all the same, the face of the world had changed. David could never again be an *insouciant* little boy; he had marked an epoch.

CHAPTER III

A WILL AND A WAY

WHEN Mr. Gilmour came, as he presently did in his rôle of executor with Camilla, to look into Henry King's affairs, he had cause several times to thrust his gold-rimmed spectacles on to his forehead—always a sign of nervous irritation with him—and to exclaim, "Deuce take it all! why couldn't the man have consulted me?"

King had been indeed not only one of the most frugal of men, but singularly uninterested in money, and in his investments had acted on the delusion that, if one lets well alone, it goes on well; whereas, in point of fact, as often as not it goes to the devil.

King's investments had not exactly done that, but though in no case had he sold when he should have held, there were too many cases where he had held when he should have sold. He evidently had not been able—perhaps he had not tried—to explain satisfactorily to Camilla even so much as the marked difference between capital and income; but, at least, she was not one of those dangerous women who feel financially clever and are not: she listened quite quietly and attentively to Mr. Gilmour's explanations, with her curls shading her tear-washed cheeks, and only now and again lifted her sad blue eyes to ask him some question which showed how infinitely remote she was from understanding the A B C of Throgmorton Street; while, all the same, there was at least one point connected with money on which, as Gilmour was regretfully to discover, her husband had succeeded in teaching her thoroughly well.

David, looking back on himself long after, believed that he rather enjoyed the excitement of the funeral. His new clothes—the sable cloak in which his young person was enveloped to its very heels, the little weeper which fell from his hat, and the enormous pair of black kid gloves which he received, apparently as a present, from the undertaker, as did the other gentlemen attending the funeral—profoundly interested him. So did the great hearse, the mutes, the plumes of feathers on the slowly moving horses; and after the service, the party of guests who, with Mr. Gilmour as host, ate and drank in the parlour of the Gables of the goodly fare Susan and Jane had been preparing for days, and, after the brief Will had been read, quickly recovered what may be called a relieved and apologetic cheerfulness.

David, sitting near the window, uncurtained for the first time for five days, himself felt no small relief to see the world and the sunshine once more, and was as pleased to catch sight of old Dick, who had wandered into the Gables' front garden, dismally wondering what all the fuss and upset was about, as old Dick's vigorous tail and bark presently signalled that he was pleased to catch sight of his young friend.

In fact, it was not until daily life began again that David really missed his father. Then the blank in the empty workshop struck cold on his childish heart: when he came back from school of an afternoon the house had a strange emptiness, which was but emphasised when he ran upstairs and found his mother sitting alone in the parlour, her hands idle on her black dress, staring in the fire. Well for David his father had made him reliable, not relying. He had not needed Mr. Gilmour to tell him that he must look after his mother and help her. With his satchel flung on the table he would come and stand by her, and she would put her arm round his shoulder and her face against his fair hair—and remain thus for half an hour, perhaps, still silent, or asking him, did he remember how his father had looked on this occasion or on that, what David thought he would have said or

wished about some passing trifle of the day, to which the child replied thoughtfully, simply and not unwisely.

The greatly considered are seldom considerate. Camilla was one of the many sheltered women who feel that all sorrows are somehow less poignant and more endurable for others than for themselves. If David had to stuff his knuckles in his eyes and put the strongest guard upon himself so that his noisy, childish sobs might not reach his mother from his little bedroom—by the time she came to bed, and on her way there stopped for a minute to look in on him, he was always asleep. He used to bring her up the cup of tea, which served her as breakfast, in the morning before he went to school, with his “shining morning face” full of the deep and throbbing interest of the effort to slop as little as possible over the bread and butter in the saucer: and when Mike (of the mumps and the apple-tree) came in to play, she could hear their joyous shouts as they slid on the first ice of the season in the little pond in Mr. Gilmour’s garden. But still she knew that, in his soul, David understood.

One day in early December, when a light snowfall had powdered the garden and the housetops, Mr. Gilmour spent a long afternoon at the Gables explaining to his co-executor the state of her affairs, now fairly clear and settled. He saw her eyes wander absently over the white garden as he spoke. When he cleared his throat, and, pushing up the spectacles, said, “I am afraid, you know, it means curtailing expenses—I should do without Jane, if possible,” he perceived she was wholly indifferent. He fancied she was relieved when he added that as the house was now her own he should recommend her staying on in it; and when he continued, “The Navy’s quite an impossibility for my friend David now, I fear, and the necessary fees to apprentice him in the Mercantile Marine would, out of your small income, be a very serious consideration—a *very* serious consideration”—she looked up quickly and said, “Oh, but Davie must go to sea! Henry wished it.”

Mr. Gilmour took off the spectacles and rubbed them with his gay silk handkerchief, and replaced them before he spoke.

"It can be arranged, no doubt, my dear Mrs. King," he said. "You have friends, you know, who would think it an honour—to help you."

Camilla rose at once, a warm carmine flooding her face, and said quickly, and almost imploringly, "Oh, no, Mr. Gilmour! Henry would not have liked me to borrow money. I could not think of it."

To which poor Mr. Gilmour, repulsed, made answer that, had the sea not been an irrevocable choice, there were various businesses in which a boy might find a post: and returning prudently to the technicalities, produced two or three papers still requiring Camilla's signature, which she affixed with a readiness startling in view of her absolute ignorance of all their contents.

Then David came back from school, and Mr. Gilmour gathered his papers, and went away looking rather rueful.

At dinner that night David perceived his mother had been crying. After it, upstairs in the parlour, she called him to her, and putting her arm about him and her cheek against his hair, told him what Mr. Gilmour had said.

"You see, Davie," she added, kissing his forehead, "I know Mr. Gilmour would lend me the money, or give it me, and I can't take it. You see, I can't take it!"

And David answered guilelessly, "I think Uncle Gilmour has lots, mother. He's got a new telescope arriving next week."

Camilla, laughing and then crying a little, shook her head and said, "All the same, I mustn't take it, Davie."

And David fancied he then dimly divined, as he knew certainly hereafter, that it was because Mr. Gilmour wished to marry his mother, and that she was incapable of that infidelity, that she could not accept his gifts.

He went back presently, a thoughtful youth, to his Latin exercise: finished it; then said suddenly, "Mother!"

Camilla, still doing nothing, looked round at him.

"What should I be if I didn't go to sea?"

And she answered vaguely she thought Mr. Gilmour had said something about an office or a bank.

For the next three or four days the subject was not resumed. There was snowballing—an excessively delectable and not too hackneyed amusement; and David, who was still so unsophisticated he could enjoy someone else's hobby having as *mise-en-scène* a roof in a very low temperature, was invited to see a star through Mr. Gilmour's new acquisition. Yet, all the time, at the back of a most tenacious mind, that question of his future was fixed. In his earliest days at Mr. Pilmer's Academy he had announced, as youth rashly will, his intentions regarding his career; and now, when Mr. Pilmer's young gentlemen were sliding in the playground, and Mr. Pilmer's usher—by whose side David had paused a moment for breath—said, lightly, half joking, "You're still going to be a sailor, I suppose, King?" King paused just for a second and said firmly, "Yes, I am."

Reaching home that afternoon, at dinner he asked his mother about his grandfather, and she showed him a miniature of Forrest as a very handsome, dark-eyed young man, told David all about her elopement, and then began to talk about the house at Edmonton, the pictures, the gardens, the stables, with a hundred trivial details—the details that make the picture live—which she had herself forgotten till she spoke of them. She had, in fact, forgotten a great deal; even now, bereft and lonely, she had no regrets: her revenge on her father, had she wanted any, was complete.

David asked where exactly Cedar Lodge stood in regard to John Gilpin's famous "Bell" inn, at which, on one never-to-be-forgotten occasion (it was, in fact, the sixth anniversary of their marriage) he had been taken with his parents in a chaise to dine.

Then he enquired, "Is grandfather still angry with us?"

And Camilla, putting back the miniature into its case, said absently, "Oh, yes, I should think so, dear. He must be, or he would have written to say he felt for me"; and, as if the idea had occurred to her for the first time, she added, half to herself, "He might just have said he was sorry when Henry died!"

Whereat David put in, with the relentless directness of youth, "Perhaps he was not sorry."

The next evening he asked his mother several leading questions about banks—a subject on which she was but very feebly qualified to offer information. Fortunately, or unfortunately, David, on his memorable visit to the docks with Mr. Gilmour, had also visited with him a branch of Parr's Bank which had the honour of Mr. Gilmour as a client: and a vague impression stayed in his mind of a bevy of young gentlemen perpetually penned in little wooden boxes behind a counter till they grew old and grey, engaged in the strictly unexhilarating occupation of counting out other people's gold; the consequences of their retaining so much as a guinea for themselves being, according to Mr. Gilmour and all the rules of morality in which David had been trained, practically unthinkable.

His mother said presently that she thought, from all she heard, a bank clerk's was a very genteel occupation—that now obsolete adjective was the equivalent of the equally vague and inexpressive "nice" of our day; and that, on occasion, she believed that bank clerks became managers, and rich.

David, having reflected, enquired how they contrived to become rich, since they were so strictly forbidden ever to have any of the money with which they were surrounded; and his mother, feeling herself unable to describe the process by which a bank manager is evolved as a butterfly from a chrysalis, took refuge in that mean retreat of elders, and said, "Davie, it's time for bed!"

David lay long awake that night, his young mind working hard at the details of a scheme.

The next day, as luck would have it, when he returned from school he found his mother in bed with a headache, and proposing to stay there till eight o'clock tea-time: so he dined in the parlour alone, Susan saying (Jane, being no longer required, had carried out an old threat and married the tallow-chandler), "You eat too fast, Master Davie—you hadn't ought to scamper through the pudden like that."

While Susan was still in her scullery, washing up, David, in his little caped coat and his neckcloth, was out of the front door, and—in a bitter cold, a lightly falling snow, and the quickly coming darkness of a December afternoon—turned his steps towards Edmonton.

About six o'clock that evening, in the handsome dining-room at Cedar Lodge, with its massive furniture, its velvet curtains, its pictures, good, bad, indifferent, with the peasant saint of Murillo impoverishing them all, three gentlemen were leisurely discussing their after-dinner wine.

A huge blazing fire and the candles in massive candelabra threw their light on the round table, with its great decanters in silver stands, its heavy cut-glass and a beautiful Sèvres dessert service. Philip Forrest, still a handsome man, with his coal black eyes under a thatch of white hair, had pushed back his chair and sat at ease. On one side of him was his brother Charles, a successful maltster, a stout man, not unlike the great exile of St. Helena in figure, only fatter, with a heavy massive head much sunk on his shoulders; a perfectly shrewd, dependable and common-sensible person, and, by some remarkable freak of nature, the father of Archibald, now opposite to him.

Archibald, Philip Forrest's nephew and prospective heir, was now in his early thirties, slight and delicate in body, with pale hair already thinning on his temples, a high nar-

row forehead, a sharp worried mind, and a born judge of art and bric-à-brac.

Charles Forrest, who had regarded that taste in his brother as an amiable weakness (seeing that it had been combined with much aptitude and success in money making), had the greatest contempt for it in his son, who made it the business of his life.

That very evening the whole conversation at dessert had turned on a Delft jar, for which it appeared some fool had paid thirty guineas (Charles Forrest was certain he was a food—ay, though a greater appeared to have given him forty for it the very next day), and Charles—literally a bull in a china shop—emptied glass after glass of his brother's excellent port in perfect silence.

It is surely the marvel of that age, not that there was so much drunkenness, but that there was so little. Even after three parts of a bottle of the port, besides uncounted glasses of hock and claret at dinner, Charles Forrest remained, not only absolute master of his wits, but perfectly sagacious in judgment.

Archibald—who drank hardly any wine, an additional offence in his father's eyes and not a recommendation in his uncle's—had just produced the catalogue of a local sale, where it seemed some good glass was likely to be lurking unsuspected, when the hall-door bell rang loud and clear through the house, and its master turned, frowning, and looked at the clock on the mantelshelf.

Cedar Lodge was just over a mile from the "Bell" inn, and the young gentleman—so entirely covered in snow that, with his ruddy cheeks and his white powdered hair, he looked like an infant Father Christmas—who had there enquired his way, was already considerably out of breath. By the time he reached the hall door of Cedar Lodge, at the top of the flight of steps guarded by two nymphs holding trays of snow, he was panting hard. If courage consisted in not feeling afraid, David King was a coward: but if it rather consists

in pursuing one's purpose through fear, he was brave: for the bravest are entitled to the fears they hide. It was characteristic of him that, though the walk had been much longer and drearier than he had anticipated, it never occurred to him to turn back: and after the "Bell," when it became solitary—a white and silent world, the snow falling thick and quiet, and David's whistle to keep up his spirits sounding soft and eerie—he remained faint, but pursuing.

It must indeed be confessed that the avenue of tall trees forming the drive to the house, and looking exactly like the skeletons of ghosts shaking hands with each other above his head, had caused his young heart to beat to suffocation and had quickened his trot to a run, so that when Mr. Bates, the butler, opened the door to him, he could scarcely get out his request to see Mr. Forrest.

"And who may you be?" says Bates, surprise getting the better of his annoyance at being disturbed at supper.

When David panted that he was David King, Mr. Forrest's grandson, Bates, knowing the family history, and being under notice to leave and resenting that dismissal, decided, as he put it a few minutes later to the servants' hall, to chance it and let the governor have it straight, so he helped Master King out of his coat and suggested he should stamp his boots thoroughly on the mat before polluting the dining-room carpet.

Then Mr. Bates flung open the broad and massive door very wide, and announced in his most stentorian tones, "Master David King."

If a bomb had fallen at Philip Forrest's feet he could not have been more astonished. Except quietly raising his coal black eyes to look at the child, he did not move a muscle; Charles Forrest settled, as it were, into the folds of fat round his neck and into his black satin stock, and prepared to enjoy himself, and the visible irritation on Archibald's nervous face.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," says Philip Forrest,

as David advanced and shook hands with him and said "How d'ye do, sir?" with great politeness. (After the first plunge the water is seldom so very cold.)

"That is your great-uncle Charles," said Forrest, still watching the guest attentively with his almond-shaped eyes narrowed to a slit, "and this is your cousin Archibald." David shook hands with them both.

There was a vacant place—fortunately, next great-uncle Charles, whose very ponderousness seemed to promise security. Philip Forrest said, "You can get yourself a chair": and David selected one from a long row against the wall and brought it to the table.

Then said Uncle Charles—he had humour, had Charles—"Have an apple?" and at the same time mixed his nephew a glass of wine and water and pushed it towards him. While his elders watched him, David partook of this feast with a total absence of self-consciousness, now and again looking up to take in the serious splendours of the room, which interested, but did not awe him.

Suddenly, with a piece of apple poised on his fork, for he had peeled and was eating it with perfect gentlemanliness, he caught sight of an oval picture in a wooden frame hanging above the mantelpiece, and said, not as a question but as a statement, "That is my mother!"

And his grandfather said, "You can go and look at it."

The picture represented a very fair-haired little girl, dimple necked, white frocked, sitting on intensely green grass, with her wide wondering eyes exactly matching the blue ribbon of her sash and in the straw bonnet at her side: the portrait having as its absurd background a mountain, a river, a thunderstorm and a castellated battlement. The child looking up at it resembled the little girl in colouring, and not in the least in anything else.

When he had looked at it in perfect silence for two or three minutes, he went back to his place and finished his apple.

Then his grandfather looked up and observed, rather sardonically, "And now, perhaps, I may be informed to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?"

It was the age of formal phrases: the books out of which youth was educated were full of them: so in a minute or two David had assimilated the meaning of this stately question.

His mother, as well as his instincts, had told him that his grandfather was hostile. His instincts told him now that Cousin Archibald was more hostile still. So David's blue eyes roved until they fixed themselves on great-uncle Charles' reliable and encouraging stoutness, and addressing himself to him the youth said,

"I came to ask grandpapa for a hundred pounds."

Archibald muttered something under his breath which might have been, "I thought so!"

Forrest, fingering his glass with his long taper fingers, and looking straight at his grandson, asked, "May I enquire for what purpose?"

And David, losing his fears, launched on his story.

"I want to go to sea," he said, in his trim young voice. "Father wanted me to go into the Navy, but if he hadn't enough money I was to go into the Mercantile Marine. Uncle Gilmour says mother hasn't enough money for that either, so——"

"Who is Uncle Gilmour?" interposed Philip Forrest.

"He lives next door to us, sir," David explained. "He isn't a real uncle. He's only Mr. Gilmour: but he gives me things. He gave me a little telescope, and this knife"—the youth felt in his pocket and produced a clasp-knife which he handed to Uncle Charles, who examined it, said "Very handsome, I'm sure" in his warm, fat voice, and returned it—"and I think Uncle Gilmour would give mother the money, only she says she mustn't let him: and he said I could be a clerk in a bank, but I don't want to be: I want to go to sea: father said it would cost nearly a hundred pounds to ap-

prentice me to a good firm in the Merchant Service and a little more for the outfit, so——” says David, turning again and addressing Uncle Charles, “I came to ask grandfather if he would be so very kind as to give it to me.”

Archibald struck in with, “Your mother told you to ask for it, I suppose?”

And David said, “Mother’s in bed with a headache.” Then, compelled by a truthfulness he was never able to conquer throughout his life, he added, “Mother wouldn’t have let me come. She told me father said, Never to ask grandfather for Anything, so she wouldn’t have let me ask either. I expect she will be getting up now and I ought to go back—it’s such a very long walk,” says David, remembering it; and he got up and stood, a slight slip of a child, in front of his grandfather.

A maturer David was not able to recollect if that sanguine and youthful one had expected Philip Forrest to produce, then and there, from such pockets as the close-fitting pantaloons of that day permitted, a hundred golden sovereigns: what he did always recollect was the chill that fell on his heart when his grandfather, still looking at him fixedly with the narrow black eyes, said quietly and not ill-naturedly,

“I am sorry I can’t oblige you, young gentleman, and that you should have had your long walk for nothing. As your mother did not suggest that you should make the request”—here Archibald made a faint sound in his throat—“I need not trouble you to deliver any message to her. Meantime, as it is getting late, perhaps you had better be starting back.”

David had been brought up by a father against whose judgment there was no appeal. His strained face meant tears suppressed, but he walked up to his grandfather and to Archibald, shook hands and said good-bye without a whine or a murmur.

Then great-uncle Charles, who had watched the scene in silence, heaved his bulk with difficulty out of his chair, and rising said, “With your permission, Philip, I’ll ring and

ask Bates for my boots and overcoat. I propose to accompany my great-nephew back to Tottenham and have a chat with Camilla. I daresay the 'Bell' will provide us with a chaise."

Philip, looking at him steadily, said, "As you please, brother."

Archibald put in in his peevish voice: "It's a deuced rash thing for a man of your age, sir, with your gouty tendency, to go out on a night like this!"

Charles, who was often taken with a desire to be, metaphorically, at his son's throat, growled several expletives in his own. As for David, the sun of Uncle Charles' red and reassuring face had risen over a very bleak world.

There had been no anxiety at the Gables over David's absence, for the simple reason that his mother had supposed him to be downstairs with Susan, and Susan had supposed him to be upstairs with his mother. And very soon after Camilla came down to the parlour at eight o'clock tea-time, there was a ring at the bell, and after a short colloquy with Susan below stairs, lo! upon them a step so heavy that they loudly creaked and protested, and then David pushed open the parlour door, placed his head round it, and said, in a guilty voice,

"Mother! I've been to grandpapa's, and Uncle Charles has come back with me."

Camilla had been a girl of seventeen when Charles had last seen her, a very delicately lovely girl, a little affected, and decidedly a little silly. But love and sorrow are noble educators. There was pathos in her black frock, and that air of appeal which was second nature to her and which, to the heart of man at least, never appealed in vain. Her uncle kissed her, patted her shoulder very kindly with his large hand, and said, "Why, why, my dear! I haven't seen you since the Lord knows when"; and out of the lumber-room of memory there came to her some old wives' story that once

upon a time Uncle Charles had wished to marry her mother.

She said, "Dear Uncle Charles! what in the world has that naughty Davie been doing?"

And Uncle Charles, looking at the youth, replied that he should like a talk with David's mother alone.

David, sitting presently on a wooden chair in front of Susan's blazing kitchen fire, drying his stockinged feet, sipping a delectable hot drink she brewed him, and answering innumerable questions concerning every detail of his grandfather's appearance and ménage, chewed the cud of a most bitter disappointment. But if he was rebuffed, he was not at the end of his resources. As he drank the spiced currant wine and tried to describe in detail the noble *épergne* which formed the centre-piece of his grandfather's dining-table, his mind was busy with another possibility. Though he was no tactician at any moment of his life, he was just wise enough at the present one to postpone asking Susan for details of the dazzling career of her nephew who, starting as a stowaway, had now raised himself to the giddy eminence of the position of a third mate aboard a four hundred ton vessel trading with the West Indies.

Susan, rubbing the marks of David's boots off her white boards, muttered something deeply in her throat.

"What is a skinflint, please, Susan?" asks David.

"It's a mean old cormorant," says Susan, rubbing vindictively, "as keeps the money he can't use on purpose that it shouldn't be no use to nobody else. That's a skinflint, Davie, and don't you be one."

At that instant the parlour bell rang, and David was summoned. As he entered the room, great-uncle Charles, with the candle light falling on his bald and shiny head, was standing with his hand on the mantelshelf, warming a foot at the fire, and his mother was stooping to put on it the homely fat kettle to make the tea. She looked up as David came in, and set the kettle back on the hob.

"Oh, Davie!" she said, with that young impulsiveness

which was part of her charm and never quite left her, "you don't know how good Uncle Charles is going to be to you! You must thank him as well as ever you can: and never forget what he has done for you."

David never did.

CHAPTER IV

TROUBLED WATERS

THE life of the apprentice in the Mercantile Marine, now not a bed of roses, was in 1820 composed almost exclusively of thorns.

It is true that Charles Forrest—whose heart was as generous as his figure, and, indeed, the two often match—had apprenticed his great-nephew to an excellent firm, and not only paid for him a very considerable premium, but had been at no small pains to place him on a fine ship, under an excellent master, who had given all the necessary assurances that the youth should be berthed apart from the crew, have the same food as the officers, besides being thoroughly taught navigation and his business in all its branches.

A very tough, honest old fellow was Captain Margetson—a most capable seaman and a consummate ship-handler—far from unkindly, under a manner as rough as a nutmeg-grater, but as fully persuaded as had been Henry King that hardness, not to say harshness, is of hardiness the mother.

He kept to his bargain in really teaching his business to this new apprentice of twelve; did not pitch him, as many wretched little apprentices were pitched, despite promises and payment, to the tender mercies of the men before the mast—to live in their noisome quarters, and to be poisoned too often by the filth of the minds of these “hands” picked up anywhere, the refuse of the ports. So that, in an age when too many of his compeers were so systematically ill-treated that after the first voyage they threw up the sea in disgust, David and his relatives were lucky.

All the same, that absolutely absolute old monarch, Captain Margetson, by no means felt it his duty to interfere with the tyranny and cruelties practised on the apprentices by the first mate—also a good seaman, but a very foul-mouthed, evilly-disposed brute—vowed to break in the boys what he called their “proud-belliness,” a word which, in his mouth, signified the self-respect which engenders cleanliness of mind and body, and decent habits brought from a good home.

Thus, when young David appeared in a clean shirt, Fraser instantly sent him aloft with a grease-bag round his neck to grease down one of the top-masts, or set him some other filthy task, simply to spoil the new clothes of his outfit, and never spoke to him but in loud abuse, or the yet more tangible argument of kicks and cuffs.

When one adds to that tyranny the trials of food very politely described as rough—taken in the alarming, grim silence of the cabin—of the most inadequate sleeping accommodation, of the fierce grey rats which shared it, of the cruellest extremities of heat and cold, the tortures of sea-sickness, the loud wails of a poor little fellow-apprentice, Harry—totally unfit for the life, and who indeed eventually died of it—and of a home-longing which was not only a moral but an actual physical suffering, it may be conceded that David was of a disposition singularly determined, or of a vocation peculiarly sure, since he stuck to his guns like the man he was going to be.

It is true that those first few weeks at sea were so miserable that, in his after life, he could never bring himself to speak of them even to the wife who knew—almost—all his heart, and that when he saw his mother, it was not only because his sure young instincts told him that any sword which pierced him went through her heart also, that he remained perfectly silent on their subject.

The sufferings of children are surely one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of faith in a Divine Providence

and government of the world: all his life David King could not only remember, but, when he remembered, actually re-live, those useless miseries. The shivering little wight who sobbed himself to sleep, night after night, had neither experience nor philosophy to help him to greet the new day with the reflection that "good times and bad times and all times pass over," and that in the worst hardness one finds some property of easiness at last.

David had, indeed, advantages over Harry and others. The passion for the sea was in his blood and his bones, and, through all the hardships she inflicted, never quite betrayed the heart that loved her. He had been, too, in some measure prepared by his father—while the luckless morsel, Harry, had never been taught to wash his shirt nor even the tin pannikin for his food, much less to sew on a button or mend a sock, or avoid the real misery of having, in cramped quarters, "everything on top and nothing at hand." Then, too, his mother had deeply impressed on David—Mr. Gilmour had rubbed in the same embrocation in a solemn lecture—the goodness and the sacrifices made by great-uncle Charles: and before David's young vision was his only alternative career—of a bank-clerk, ageing and thinning in his sheep-pen behind the counter.

Above all, where his father had been grimly determined and dourly fixed on his purpose, the son carried, beneath a very serene temper and his honest blue eyes, an obstinacy yet more immovable, and at least as much of that grit, without which brains and all the smiles of fortune avail but little.

Perhaps it was those blue eyes and that innocent face and heart which gained David his first friend on board—one of the seamen, a Scot and an old man-o'-war's man, who, having served in the Navy for many years, had returned to the sea for peace and quiet to be out of the reach of his wife's tongue, and who never used his own if signs and silence would serve instead.

For a fortnight he looked at David out of the corner of

a shrewd grey eye, and spoke him never a word. Then one day, when the unfortunate youth had just received a cuffing from Fraser for misunderstanding an order, old MacCulloch, passing by, cast a look on him which caused David to swallow his tears, and some more to come like a sudden, soft rain on his heart.

The next day, when opportunity served, MacCulloch, removing his pipe from one side of his mouth to the other, nodded at him sideways in a fashion meant to be, and in fact being, encouraging: a little later, David (for now he knew), coming on the last of the five surprise-packets of sweets which his mother had inserted (always with a little pink note of love and advice) among his clothes in his sea-chest, placed part of it as an offering in MacCulloch's horny hand; the old Scot again nodded sideways, and the very next day the ice was broken and the pair were talking.

That is to say, in as few words as possible MacCulloch informed David that at sea there was no such thing as justice and injustice, but only, as David's father had told David's mother, Duty or Mutiny; and that in the Mercantile Marine you were lucky that the punishment for rebellion was only a rope's-ending, while on a king's frigate it earned you the yard-arm. Further, MacCulloch (who on land, alas! fell into the commonest vice of his age and his nation as often as he had the chance, while, in the compulsory temperance on board, he had full use of a clear and excellent brain) briefly bade Davie get all he could out of Captain Margetson's books on navigation to which he was allowed access, and to persevere in the best profession in the world. Then the old boy, ashamed of his wordiness, chewed and spat, and spat and chewed in long silence, while a fresh breeze stirred Davie's fair hair and a fresh hope cheered his heart. The flitting petty cruelties and humiliations on a youth who con-worst was over. Even Fraser almost abandoned at last in-tinued hopeful and persevering, and never again gave his

tormentor (for this also was MacCulloch's advice) the satisfaction of seeing his resentment or his tears.

The "Princess Amelia" traded between Great Britain and Demerara, making occasionally a voyage to the Bay of Fundy, Nova Scotia, for lumber, or boards used for the heading of rum and molasses and sugar hogsheads.

The cold in the Bay was so bitter as to be, even to a child as indifferent as most children to changes of temperature, a real agony—especially when the vessel lay at anchor in one of the roadsteads of the Bay, and the bow-ports were obliged to be open to receive the cargo, and at night were covered only with a thin matting; while there was not a fire permitted save in the gallery and the cabin.

To any Northerner, surely, one of the most unforgettable of earthly-heavenly impressions is his first sight and scent of the South. After that cold which froze sea, earth and sky to the blue-grey of an icicle, which crept into his very bones and paralysed his very soul, lo! there dawned on David a world warm, brilliant, soft, of dazzling, persistent sunshine, of a deep azure above and a deeper azure below, lapping gently in little waves like a lake; borne over it, as one passed some Island of the Blest, the aromatic scents of tropical growths; and, now and again, birds of gorgeous plumage—the birds of a dream.

If there had been any use in writing letters—which, of course, there was not (during this first voyage of fourteen months David never received a single letter or newspaper from home)—he could no more now, than later, have described these things, for, like many another Briton, he was inarticulate exactly in proportion as he was moved. But the impression was ineffaceable, and itself effaced some, at least, of the misery which had preceded it.

Now, sometimes, on those rich and balmy evenings he would sit on the main hatch, surrounded by the crew (while it eternally and meditatively chewed tobacco), and sing to it, in his fresh treble, not because he knew how to sing, but

because he had been asked to do so and was always willing to oblige. It is true that his *répertoire* consisted solely of those Songs of Zion which he had piped with Mr. Pilmer's other young gentlemen in All Hallows Church, but the audience, not being in a position to choose, put up with that. An older David's eye twinkled not a little when he recalled how serenely he gave the Old Hundredth as a solo, and would not the least have boggled at thus rendering the Hallelujah Chorus had he happened to know the air.

Old MacCulloch stood by, shifting his quid from one side of his mouth to the other, and vaguely feeling proud of his protégé. The rustle of the sails and the lap of the water made accompaniment to the young voice.

"The spacious firmament on high,
With all the blue ethereal sky,"

and the stars coming into it, formed a gorgeous canopy; the night air was softer than velvet, and the aching miseries of cold, hardship, tyranny, suffering, were, for the moment, wiped away like the writing on a slate. It is true they would shortly be rewritten; but what one has lived through once one can live through again, and David had learnt that after the blackest night comes dawn.

When he set his young foot again in England, and got back to Tottenham as soon as might be, he was, despite short sleep, hard knocks and harder fare, so grown and brown and filled out that Susan, when she opened the door to him, did not know him, and he had to thump her quite vigorously on the back and say, "Why, you old duffer, Sue, it's me!" before she was sufficiently recovered to have an attack of spasms and warn him, in gasps, not to play the same trick on his mother.

In those fourteen months, he had so thoroughly and practically learnt his business that there was not any conceivable operation on board ship at which he could not lend a hand, nor a rope on it whose use he did not know by heart. But

much more than that knowledge—for knowledge is at least as easy of acquisition as wisdom is difficult—he had gained experience of life, and strength and independence of character.

When his mother had kissed and cried over him, and felt and patted him after the way of maternal creatures to find out that he was all her own and sound and safe and real, she stroked his rough young paws with her little hands, and asked him the most remarkable questions, revealing herself to be completely at sea (or should it not rather be said, entirely on land?) not only regarding poops and starboard and gunwale, and that end of the vessel she persistently pronounced as if it were the complement of arrows, but also regarding the entire conditions of life and human nature on board ship.

It was the dusk of a summer evening when David came back: and, presently, enter Susan with the tea-tray and, as an extra for Davie, a fine dish of home-made cakes. He fell on them with so astonishing a zest—for greediness had never been one of his sins—that Camilla said rather anxiously,

“Isn’t the food nice on board, Davie, dear?”

And David, making away with another cake and that consuming desire to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth which pursued him through life, replied after a short pause, “Not so very,” and saw again the weevilly biscuits the rats had gnawed, the men skimming the scum of vermin from the top of their coffee, and the tepid oil in a tin masquerading as butter.

Likewise, when she asked about his companions, as she did presently as the summer evening waned and the moonlight came softly into the little parlour, instinct, or the unspoken teaching of his father that her two men must spare her pain and stand buffer for ever between her and the ugly things of life, caused David to idealise MacCulloch to such an extent that that worthy (at the moment richly compensating himself for forced abstinence on the voyage) would cer-

tainly have criticised his portrait, as he had always criticised any statements he disapproved, by the simple words "You lee"; while as for Fraser, David, feeling himself unequal to the whitewashing here demanded, wisely eliminated him from the picture altogether.

He was but thirteen years old; yet, even now, he felt himself somehow older than that pretty mother, with the black lace on her fair hair, and her white neck still dimpled like a girl's.

When, the next day, he went to see Mr. Gilmour—looking just the same as ever, with the same rosy cheeks, the rosy-cheeked apples ripening on his mantelpiece, and the usual agreeable litter of books on his floor—Davie felt gravely pleased and responsible when Mr. Gilmour said to him, as man to man, "I wouldn't tell your mother, you know, too much about your life aboard. It would only upset her"; and he was able to reply, "I haven't, sir."

It must be put to Mr. Gilmour's credit that he had seen to it, before David's first voyage, that the boy should not be flung unwarned to the devils waiting to destroy innocence, so that it was in some measure due to Mr. Gilmour, though in greater measure to his own character and to his father's, that David had come back with his soul and body as clean and as honest as his eyes.

Nor can it be said that his mother, in her simplicity and dependence, had no influence on him. Before he went away this time she gave him a green shagreen case containing a little compass and sundial which had been his father's, not having the remotest idea what you did with the instruments, and dimly feeling that, with a little provocation, they might go off and do something to you.

David, greatly interested, explained their mild uses; and Camilla, shutting the case, said, as it were, wistfully, "And you will remember, Davie, won't you, whenever you look at them, that you must be *just* like your father was?"

After all, hours of forethought and a wider knowledge of

life have made women less effectual monitors, and the recollection of his mother's innocence helped David to respect other women's, and to keep his own.

When it came to be within a day or two of rejoining the "Princess Amelia," it must be confessed that he was not seldom afflicted with a certain tightening of the throat, which was not at all relieved—for he tried—by the application of one of the black currant lozenges carefully packed in his sea-chest against the advent of a cold. Still, even on the last Sunday, looking out of his own neatly-upholstered pew at All Hallows and beholding Mr. Pilmer's young gentlemen in gloves and clover in theirs, David was not only unenvious of them, but had the deep and proud satisfaction of feeling himself a man, with a man's work waiting him in the world: and when his old friend Michael poked him as they were coming out of church, and said in an entirely audible *sotto voce*, "I say, King, aren't you beastly sick of ship's biscuit?" King replied, "Not half so beastly sick as I was of mugging at Latin grammar," and was felt, and felt himself, to have scored.

Still, the next day, after the parting with his mother, when he drove up to town in a chaise with Mr. Gilmour—who was constitutionally, and on the present occasion perhaps calculatedly, chatty—David could only save himself from unworthy weakness by being perfectly dumb, and was not ungrateful to Mr. Gilmour for answering all his own questions himself.

The second voyage was, after all, an easy and pleasant thing compared to the first. Fraser was not on board: old MacCulloch's eye was friendly: Captain Margetson, finding David really meant business, was more ready to teach him his own; and David found, as many have found before him, that, for all the tall talk of liberty and independence, there are worse things in the world than obedience to a strict command of whose efficiency one is not in doubt.

The boy found his sea-legs on this voyage in every sense:

became as familiar with the life as if he had been born web-footed: grew to know, in the fashion which seems to landsmen magical and miraculous, by her rigging, the cut of her bows, the look of her top-hamper, the nationality, ownership, cargo and destination of almost any sail they sighted. The pathless waters of the deep blue sea were no more pathless for him, but marked by hills and valleys, ridges and watchways, as the dry land is marked for the landsman: he learnt that intentness of observation which is the sailor's before all men's: and in the eternal changes of sea and sky found not merely interest, but something like entrancement. If he had not been perfectly sure on his first leave that he had chosen his life well, by his second the witch's potion had wrought its full work on him, and he was the sea's for ever.

This time he found changes at Tottenham. Philip Forrest was dead. Perhaps he could hardly have done his grandson a worse turn at this juncture than to have left him a fortune. He had, instead, adhered in the spirit, if not in the letter, to his views of fifteen years earlier. Archibald and two of the old City charities were his co- and equal heirs: and Camilla irritated Mr. Gilmour not a little by persisting in being grateful to a parent from whom she derived only certain jewels and miniatures which had been her mother's and in which her father had had a life interest only. To make her understand that these objects passed into her possession because they were, in fact, hers was impossible and perhaps undesirable. When Mr. Gilmour heard her telling David how much she valued them as a sign that after all her father had really forgiven her, the little gentleman only shuffled his feet impatiently as he stood on the hearthrug at the Gables, and presently relieved his feelings by explaining to David the real state of affairs, adding, "Still, if it makes her happier to think so—" and finishing with, "Women are very strange creatures—very strange indeed"; as, in fact, they are.

It did not yet dawn on David, though it was already the

case, that Mr. Gilmour had become quite used to his position of unwelcomed suitor, that by now (the state of mind is not uncommon) he preferred to sigh rather than to succeed, and that he had found out not only that Camilla, having given all her heart to her husband, would never take it away again, but that, gentle and affectionate as she was, she would have been but mildly sympathetic with the pursuits and habits which had become Mr. Gilmour's second self; being, in fact, the sort of woman who, unlike the little girl in the poem, could not only see all the stars in the firmament twinkle, twinkle without wondering what they are, but would have been very much bored if anyone had enlightened her.

Before his third voyage David's indentures were transferred through the influence of his *deus ex machina*, Charles Forrest, and he became third mate on board the "Africa," a fine large vessel opening a new trade between Holland and China. Having been loaded in London with a freight for Singapore, as well as with chests of Turkish opium for China, the "Africa" distinguished herself on David's first voyage on her by making the quickest journey to Singapore so far accomplished, her wonderful run through the Straits of Sunda and Banea, without once dropping anchor, being one of his proudest early recollections. The ship was commanded by Captain George Easton—as plucky an old seaman as ever stepped, an abler and broader-minded man than Margetson, but, like him, a commander who, in the cockpit slang, kept every one on board "under the fear of the Lord and a broomstick."

It is not proposed to follow David King through his early adventures (which were, after all, neither more nor less adventurous than most sailors' in his day), nor to touch on any adventures save as they served to make him the man he became. At seventeen he was second mate; at twenty, first.

By then he had seen more of the world, and perhaps more of human nature—and not of the worst of human nature,

though he knew it in the raw and the rough—than his great-uncle and his grandfather had seen in their whole lives.

While young Michael was fattening on the fleshpots of Tottenham and, as articulated pupil to a local solicitor, learning to settle pettifogging disputes over a right of way or the terms of a lease, his erstwhile companion had seen the fairy isles of the Bermudas, with their cedar groves, their orange trees and their coral reefs—as brilliantly lovely as they are treacherous and dangerous to the navigator: while as chief mate he had undertaken not only the arduous and responsible duties of his own post, but, Captain Easton being ill in his bunk, had brought the “Africa” safely through one of the worst gales (which wrecked many a better ship) in the memory of that unimpressible and much-experienced old mariner.

He would have been a fool indeed who mistook King, at one and twenty, for anything but a sailor. He had reached the very moderate stature which was all he ever attained: his body was lean and hard and in the very pink of condition: his face was as brown as a berry: and his eyes reflected the warm and tranquil seas of the South. There was, in fact, always something tranquil about David. He had found his work, and was doing it to the best of his ability, with a pride and satisfaction in it, but without the worry of vain and various ambitions. Like Hume, he had the felicity to be “ever more disposed to see the favourable than the unfavourable side of things”; unlike the philosopher, he had a strong trust in God and man, inherited from his mother, and a most affectionate heart.

Having regarded books in general as his natural enemies and instruments of torture, he had come to respect but (with a few exceptions) hardly to love them. At one and twenty he saw life, not through their medium, which is as through a glass darkly, but entirely with his own eyes. His opinion—which he seldom gave till it was sought, and then reluctantly—was his own, fresh coined from his own mint, not the reproduction of some one else’s, heard or read. To

"a few strong instincts and a few plain rules" he adhered with a remarkable tenacity through life: the rash who mistook his good temper for weakness were apt to find themselves upon against a rock. As for his religion, he had lived among scenes where unbelief was more difficult than belief, for "these men see the wonders of the Lord and His works in the deep."

Once a year, Camilla had herself written a letter of gratitude to Charles Forrest, and desired David to do the same. His was not, it must be confessed, interesting, being, in fact, a bald and strictly conscientious log of his voyages, recalling tides and winds, and giving brief and sternly correct nautical details, which were as profoundly uninteresting to Uncle Charles as records of the money market would have been to his nephew.

After David had been first mate on the "Africa" for about a year, Forrest desired to see him, and David went off to Bloomsbury, where Forrest had a gloomy and comfortable house, where he lived only in winter, spending that part of the year when London is fashionable, and the country entrancing at the Grey Priory, a little property belonging to him at Inglethorpe, near Dartford, in Kent. He was at the moment suffering from a smart attack of the gout, which he had had so much pleasure in making.

It was a dull, windy afternoon of late October when David came to dine, and perhaps the adverse conditions without enhanced the comfort within.

Charles Forrest looked much older than on that memorable evening at Cedar Lodge, Edmonton, some eight or ten years earlier. He was in the dining-room, with his gouty foot bandaged and on a rest, after the manner—now—of heavy fathers on the stage in need of an excuse for disinheriting an heir, and—then—of innumerable elderly gentlemen in real life and too easy circumstances. His little twinkling eyes were now almost completely imbedded in fat, but they looked out pretty shrewdly at his nephew.

"How are you, sir?" says David in his frank voice.

Uncle Charles had always been his friend: David knew no reason why he should not be his friend now.

"Pretty fair, except for this damned foot," Forrest answered. Then he asked after David's mother, and listened, David thought, more attentively than people usually listen to the answers to such perfunctory questions. "She was a pretty creature, your mother," says Charles Forrest, considering the flock wall-paper at the back of her son's head. "And so was her mother before her." Then, as if he came out of a reverie, he added, "Ring the bell for Saunders, please: we'll have dinner"; and Saunders, having helped his master to the table, and his master's super-excellent cook having sent in a super-excellent soup, they began their meal.

If, as they talked of indifferent subjects, David was aware of his great-uncle's keen scrutiny of him, he was not embarrassed by it. He had never, since that evening at Edmonton, sat at a rich man's table, and now, as then, he enjoyed its advantages *pro tem*, and was calmly interested in a life and conditions totally foreign to anything to which he was accustomed.

When Saunders had put the wine on the table, and left the room, David, peeling a pear, says, "What's my cousin Archibald doing, sir?"

"He's taking care of his health," replied Archibald's father, as if it were a career—as, in point of fact, it is: then, looking fixedly at his guest over the decanters, he said, "I suppose you and your mother felt it pretty badly that my brother left you both out of his will—confoundedly unjust, of course"; and he considered his great-nephew with his little eyes full on him.

"Oh, no, we didn't," says David, "we never expected anything else. My grandfather made it quite plain from the first—my mother was very pleased at having the miniatures and things."

Forrest growled deeply in his throat at this, and said, as

Gilmour had done, "Why, man, they were her own!" Then he added, "I suppose if you had found yourself in possession of a tidy fortune, like Archibald, you would have given up the sea?"

David looked up with surprise. "Why should I?" he said. Then something clouded his eyes for a moment as if the suggestion were unwelcome to him. "I don't see why I should have given it up," he said more slowly. "It's my business."

"You like it?" says Forrest. "Deuced uncomfortable quarters and filthy food, they tell me."

And David, looking round the heavy, rich room; and fingering his glass of port with his lean, capable hand, says with a laugh, "Well, it isn't anything like this"; and added, "It's my work, though. I shouldn't care for any other: you get used to the hardships till you don't notice them." Then he added awkwardly, with the colour rising in his tanned face, for to express gratitude was as much an effort as to be grateful was a natural instinct, "I am always very much obliged to you, sir, for all you did for me."

Forrest's little eyes never left his nephew's face. "A hundred pounds," he said slowly. "Why, that's nothing to a rich man."

"It's done everything for me, though," answered David.

There was silence for a few minutes, except the noisy wind outside and the cheerful crackling of the fire.

Then Forrest began speaking of Archibald again. "He's married, you know," he said. "A sickly-looking creature, his wife—the two of them are always cossetting each other. The wind's in the east or the north—and they can't stand it—it's got to be in some quarter, I suppose; and"—here the unregenerate father chuckled—"Archie gets twinges of the gout—after all his toast and water; and last week the fool gave twenty pounds for a saucer—I give you my word for it, a saucer, without even a cup to it—Good Lord!"

David was uncertain if the ejaculation were aroused by

Archibald's cupless saucer or a twinge in Forrest's own foot.

When the guest rose to go presently, the host was not so effusive and un-British as to mention that he had enjoyed his great-nephew's visit, while David, who had none of the facility and felicity of phrase which is as agreeable in a young Frenchman, because it is perfectly natural to him, as it would be disagreeable in, because unnatural to, most young Britons, said his bald "Good-bye, sir—and thank you": and they parted, friends for life—nay, since affection is the one thing we can carry away, perhaps beyond it.

King was absent on his next voyage for nearly twenty months. When he again landed in England he had been eighteen without hearing, and without a chance of hearing, from home. His delight at being in the old country, and feeling her soil beneath his feet, is one the landsman can never know in its depth and richness, as he can never realise the sailor's nostalgia for the sea.

David, usually the most simple and thrifty person, recklessly posted from the London docks to Tottenham on that April afternoon, with the sunshine gay on the pretty old houses, and the creepers in young leaf on their walls. He saw an acquaintance or two as he drove into the familiar village, past the old doctor's house standing back from the road at the High Cross, and waved friendly recognition. When his chaise drew up at the Gables, it seemed to him the house had been newly curtained, and was changed, though he would have been hard put to it to say, on the spur of the moment, where the changes lay. He walked quickly up the path and knocked at the low door—and behold, the dolphin knocker, which he had been lifted up to have the felicity of knocking with his own fat hand in his youth, was replaced by a new thing, without interest.

He felt suddenly cold, as one feels going into a dark cave out of a bright day.

And, instead of Susan making ready to have palpitations of agitation and joy, there opened the door a perter, younger

person, who informed him, in answer to his stammered inquiries as his eye unconsciously sought the little shiny table where the model four-master had stood under its glass shade, and stood no more:

"I think as there *was* a Mrs. King as lived here some time ago, but I haven't heard what's happened to her, and the name's Curtis now."

Then the door closed slowly in David's face.

CHAPTER V

THEODORA

THE village of Inglethorpe is in Kent, seventeen miles from London and two from Dartford, and stands, with its beautiful old church, on the side of a hill overlooking the Thames and, across it, to the flat but not unpicturesque river-side of Essex.

In the early nineteenth century Inglethorpe was not only a very charming little place but, as places as far as seventeen miles from London were apt to be in the days before railways, self-contained and self-sufficing, not to say self-sufficient, with a tendency to regard Dartford—then a very pleasant and prosperous little town with a weekly market and excellent posting inns—as vulgarly and unnecessarily large and bustling. One drove into it, indeed, and took advantage of its superiority in the matter of shops, while reserving to oneself the right to despise it, and find its society lacking in the mysterious *je ne sais quoi* bestowed on one's own village.

Inglethorpe really had the *cachet* of antiquity. Inglethorpe Place, standing on the summit of the hill and commanding a fine view of the Thames from Erith nearly to the Nore, had been an important seat as far back as the time of Henry VIII., when its then owner, Sir John Wilford, Controller of the Town and Marshes of Calais (who still lies "entombed" in Inglethorpe church "in a faire chappell of his owne foundation"), had there entertained Cardinal Wolsey and his train. When the estate passed into Archibald Forrest's possession, as part of the dowry of his wife, Miss Adelaide Wilford, Sir John's last lineal descendant, it was

still a beautiful place—with its old gatehouse with the Wilford family arms above it, and its stately oak-panelled rooms—fit background for the *vertu* and *bijouterie* which Charles Forrest so heartily despised his brother and son for collecting.

The church—St. Mary's—a little further down the hill, still remains the most beautiful specimen of Gothic architecture in the county, unspoilt by the hand of time and the crueller hand of the restorer—in style, rich, warm and delicate; sumptuous and ornate, but never meretricious and gaudy; perfect and complete in every part, the handiwork of the old builders who knew that "the gods see everywhere."

Hard by the church is, and was, the rectory; having in 1830 as rector, Richard Anstruther, who had rebuilt it, laid out its gardens with a pride, knowledge and personal care then rarely expended on them: while the great stables which, in the time of his predecessor, had contained only the one forlorn buggy and weary old Dobbin which formed the sole means of locomotion of many a rectory, were now admirably well appointed and full to their utmost capacity. Anstruther was, indeed, a keen judge and lover of a horse, hunted with the fox-hounds, and drove a phaeton with as spanking a pair of greys as were to be seen in the county.

Half a mile from the rectory there stands, as there stood, facing the river and the sunshine, Charles Forrest's home and country house, the Grey Priory. Right on the river itself were the dwellings of the poor and the very poor: among the former, Miss Sarah Burchell, the rector's cousin, occupied with her young niece Ferry Cottage, an absurd little wooden house, interestingly situated, as its name denoted: while nearly next door was the ramshackle dwelling, with its long strip of garden running to seed and the shore, of Peter Moor, the doctor.

The dwellings of the very poor were as squalid as they were picturesque. Moor always expected, and found there, low fever, ague, influenza and intemperance—perfectly as a matter of course.

Winding up the hill again stood two handsome red-brick Georgian houses, both solid, comfortable, well planned, with their symmetrical windows, stately, well-kept gardens and neat paddocks. One was possessed by Mr. Thomas Clutterbuck, who, having made his money as a wholesale tallow-chandler in Dartford, was not at first visited by the select society of Inglethorpe, until his constant attendance at church, his large subscriptions to charities, and his frequent invitations to card parties, rounded off by excessively cosy suppers of hot lobsters which so acceptably wound up the evening when one had dined at four, five or six of an afternoon, softened its patrician heart: and Mr. and Mrs. Clutterbuck found themselves taken to it, tallow and all.

The sister house—the more imposing of the two, and appropriately named Beech House from the splendid copper beeches on its lawn—was the property of Mr. John Heywood, lately in tea and Mincing Lane (obviously a far genteeler thing than tallow and Dartford), and consequently and at present in possession of one of those sober and substantial fortunes which, in the blessed days before the income-tax and the multiplication of luxuries (with their fatal tendency to become necessities), rendered a man rich.

Heywood, who was a short-necked, short-tempered, red-faced and very obstinate elderly gentleman, had married late in life, having, in fact, waited for his Rachael, who was called Elizabeth, more than seven years while she conscientiously minded her widowed father at Epsom, that father having several times tantalisingly threatened to die of gout at the heart, but not actually doing so until his daughter was nearly thirty-five years old.

That was a desperate age for a woman in the early nineteenth century: but it must be confessed it found Elizabeth still of a very neat slight figure, with her hair as brown and her cheeks as warm of colour as they had been when she was a girl: indeed, it was not till little Theo—their only child—was becoming quite big that her mother grew stout and round-

about, and the pretty brown hair turned grey; while almost to the end of her days her cheeks kept their pink and her eyes were as clearly blue as they had been in her youth. Something of the girl's heart, of the young creature's enjoyment in simple things, she kept too for ever. Her husband's obstinate confidence that she was worth waiting for was abundantly justified: and he remained all his life perfectly ready, nay, extremely desirous, to quarrel with anyone who dared to hint a flaw in her. So that it was in a very happy and well-ordered home that little Theodora made her appearance; though she found of course, as the children of the elderly always find, her father and mother already set firmly in a mould; whereas the young parent grows up, as it were, with his young; is their companion, experimenting with life; and educates himself in educating them.

If her mother was most affectionate and conscientious—at three Theo was sitting at her feet on a bead footstool reluctantly hemming a duster—John Heywood was proud excessively of this handsome, dark-eyed, intelligent little creature. When she coldly and crushingly divined that the bear was really only a parent, idiotically dressed in the drawing-room hearthrug, and instantly pierced the true identity of Santa Claus, he was at once annoyed at being made to feel a fool and ten times prouder of her than before. Their tempers, which were not at all unlike, clashed indeed like cymbals many times before Theo was five years old, and it was the superior and uninterested manner in which the small thing sat in her evening frock and sash and listened to Madam—who had a very sweet, fresh voice—singing the nursery rhymes which have been good enough for scores of generations of little boys and girls, which finally decided him that Theodora, as in imminent danger of priggishness, must find companions of her own age.

Fortunately, Inglethorpe had one ready to hand in the small and comfortable person of little Nancy Legard, the niece of Miss Sarah Burchell of Ferry Cottage.

Miss Burchell was a shrewd and determined spinster, aged actually only forty-five, but having left coquetry so far behind her that it was her habit to wear a light or dark brown front on her own grey hair—as it were impartially, and as suited her convenience; while her garments were obviously chosen exclusively for comfort, and worn with an air as who would say, “Criticism and enjoy yourself, it’s all one to me!” Still, if the village had had any imagination, it should easily have constructed an earlier Miss Burchell as a very lively, original, attractive and warm-hearted young woman. That warm heart and excellent brain were wholly devoted to her orphan niece, whom, out of her own absurd pittance, she fed, clothed and educated, and who was at this epoch a very dear little girl, a year younger than Theodora, with a fat, soft neck, curly brown hair, a reflecting mind and a very compassionate heart.

One of the most indelible of Nancy’s early recollections was of the day when Theo came to Ferry Cottage to see the gorgeous doll’s house (nearly as nobly proportioned as Princess Victoria’s in Kensington Palace) which Nancy’s cousin and godfather, Mr. Anstruther at the rectory, had handsomely presented to her. For it was on that day that Nancy of four, hugging her doll and child Rosalie to her, was dismayed and startled by Theo’s pronouncement:

“Dolls aren’t real!”

“Rosalie’s real,” says Nancy, clasping her tighter.

Theo smiled a disdainful and grown-up smile. “You’re so silly, Nancy,” she said.

And Nancy, who had plenty of spirit, returned, “I’m not!”

When she had sufficiently relented to open the doll’s house and display the perfection of its equipment, Theo, in spite of her grandeur, was almost as deeply interested as Nancy herself.

Presently Theo, who loved to show off her powers, announced that she could take the four-poster in the doll’s best bedroom to pieces and replace it intact again. Nancy, cast-

ing doubts on Theo's ability, put Theo on her mettle: the doll's bed was dismantled and put together again, but so imperfectly that Nancy, who was neat and particular, wept aloud: her aunt was called in to arbitrate, and Theo was smartly reprimanded and sent home in disgrace. Miss Burchell's unjust partiality for her niece and nursling over Theo was, in fact, perfectly naked and unashamed.

During the Christmas season there were always in Inglethorpe some half-dozen children's parties—the Clutterbucks giving the most magnificent of these for their brood of seven—and all attended by little Theo in the handsome party frocks suitable to the Heywoods' ample means, and by little Nancy in the home-made muslin suitable to Miss Burchell's no means at all. It was not this discrepancy, however, which angered Sarah Burchell so much as Theo's manifest indifference to her finery—for her vanity was from very early days more than skin deep, and lay not in a desire to look pretty, but to seem clever.

Thus, it was Theo's daring hand which drew the best plums from the snapdragon, and Theo's quickness and foresight which left her in possession of the winning seat at musical chairs. At those abominable guessing games—most proper to irritate the brain all games are supposed to rest—it was Theo who always triumphantly guessed right: the other children gazed at her in wide-eyed awe and silence: Miss Burchell permitted herself to ejaculate "Humph!" and Mrs. Heywood, who would hardly have been human or maternal if she had not been pleased to find her little goose a swan, was yet sensible enough to go straight home and arrange with her husband that the plan of Nancy's sharing gratis with Theo the educational advantages provided daily at Beech House by Miss Potter (a decayed gentlewoman living above the Berlin wool shop in the village) should be carried through immediately.

It was unfortunate that Miss Potter's sole idea of education was to make her pupils learn by heart from one of those

primers which conveyed information by means of questions (What is saltpetre? Where is Chimborazo? Who was Jason?) while she sat by the fire in a little shawl and kept her rheumatism out of draughts. For Theo, who, besides being quick to acquire, had an excellent memory, soon reeled off the answers by the dozen without effort, and gained all the marks: while little Nancy, who was not at all lacking in good sense, had the corner of her eye and most of her attention always on her dear Rosalie, who, propped on the sofa cushion and surrounded with books and slates, was supposed to be drinking of the Pierian spring at the same time as her mother and mistress.

When, therefore, at dessert Theo's parents inquired which little girl had done the better at the day's tasks, Theodora, who was perfectly truthful, was always able to reply that she had. Her mother, casting about in her just and simple mind for the necessary and suitable snub, said, "Nancy is a very clever little girl at her needle though," Theo (who, in truth, wished to excel in everything) lifted her grave and beautiful eyes to her mother's face, and said, "It was about the lessons papa asked me": and papa deeply growled something in his throat, which, when Theodora had gone to bed, he translated to mean that Theo must be sent to school.

It was to her lifelong loss that this scheme—after many heart-searchings and confabulations on the part of her parents—was after all finally discarded in favour of another governess. For it is the rude candour of equals, not the corrections of superiors, which is so salutary for vanity: the kindest thing any parent can do for his child is to have other children. Failing brothers and sisters, if Theo at twelve had ever seen herself as five and forty unflattering little schoolfellows saw her, she would have attained a self-knowledge which, in fact, she missed for ever.

As comparisons with Nancy had been so unwholesomely in favour of Theo, it was arranged that Theo should enjoy the new governess' attentions alone.

John Heywood disliked Miss Winter—a thin-lipped, clever woman with a handsome pair of dark eyes—from the first; but her advertisement in *The Times*, in which she had offered herself as having the most excellent educational system and the highest testimonials (demanding of course a salary commensurate thereto), had not lied.

The age was the age of the notable housewife. When most people of their fortune had men-servants, the Heywoods were admirably served by maids: Madam knew every saucepan and broomstick in her house as well as if it had been a relation, and, personally, how to cook and serve a super-excellent dinner: so that, while perfectly willing to leave Miss Winter to inform Theo on things immaterial—such as the history of Rome and the geography of the Caucasus—she was naturally and sensibly minded herself to show her daughter how to manage her house.

The psychological moment arriving, therefore, when a pig from the little home farm was killed, Madam delightedly proposed to utilise the creature from his snout to his tail, and announced one morning at breakfast in her comfortable voice that she wished Theo to forego her books and spend the morning in the kitchen.

Miss Winter compressed her lips.

Theo looked up with, "Oh! mama, it's my literature morning. *Must I?*"

Madam, in answer to Miss Winter's unuttered but evident sentiments on the subject, said, very good-temperedly, "I am sorry to take Theo away from her lessons, but I *do* want her to know how to make those sweet little pork-pies!"

Miss Winter replied frigidly, "It must, of course, be as you choose, ma'am. It is certainly not my place to put my own wishes forward."

Whereat John Heywood, fiercely crackling his newspaper, had the ill-breeding to reply, "No, it is not!"

An exceedingly reluctant and an even haughty Theo, therefore—she was now about thirteen years old, with a splendid

mane of curly dark hair, and long slim legs with frilly trousers coming below the frock—was compelled to assist the pig to become pork, ham, bacon, trotters, brawn, sausage, and, finally, little pies. Nancy, especially asked to come up from Ferry Cottage to share in this metamorphosis, was entirely delighted to abandon for it William the Conqueror and Magna Charta: with Madam, Theo, Louisa (Madam's elderly maid and once Theo's nurse), Janet the cook, and Laura the kitchenmaid, spent four busy hours in the kitchen; and about three o'clock in the afternoon started homewards, with a little basket on her arm containing one of the "sweet little pork-pies," deliciously unwholesome, to take to her aunt.

In the midst of business so absorbing, Theodora's cold silence had been quite unnoticed by her mother. Theo had done her share well—she was never slow or stupid at anything—which was all Madam perceived, except, presently, a fraction of the relief with which her daughter returned to the schoolroom and Miss Winter.

Walking with her pupil in the grounds that afternoon, and returning by the farm and the pigsties, no allusion to their inmates passed Miss Winter's conscientious lips: and it was only because it is what we really think, rather than what we say, which influences, that Theo was perfectly aware that Miss Winter considered her pupil had a soul above trotters and was wasting a fine mind upon them. By degrees, but of course inevitably, all Miss Winter's views and theories of life impressed themselves on Theo: hereafter she often expressed those opinions as if they were, and perhaps in time really thought them to be, her own.

After the pig episode, the relations between John Heywood and his daughter's governess became agonisingly polite—in fact, strained to breaking-point.

So that Miss Winter's fall would, in any case, have been but a matter of time.

In their early days at Inglethorpe the Heywoods had found the rectory occupied by a Mr. Greene, a timid man, terri-

fied of offending the congregation, with whom, as a consequence, John Heywood, his churchwarden, was always in dispute, until twelve years later Mr. Greene died and Richard Anstruther arrived in his stead.

Anstruther—the spoilt son of a Welsh landowner—was wealthy, capable, energetic, of a freely sarcastic tongue, and, instead of treading delicately among his parishioners' susceptibilities as if they were eggs, acted on the bolder assumption that there is no making omelettes without breaking several of them. Being thus well disposed to quarrel with anyone and perfectly able to hold his own, John Heywood respected and liked him. On his side, Anstruther, himself of a higher social class and education, liked the tough and sensible old merchant and to dine at his generous table, where hospitality was brought to a fine art. He liked Madam too, who took all his sarcasms *au pied de la lettre*, and laughed at his good stories—when they had been carefully explained to her—with a freshness really endearing. Theodora, Anstruther only knew as a *gauche*, handsome child, whom he sometimes met out walking in the lanes with a thin duenna.

An old college friend of Anstruther's, Clarke, Fellow of Christ's, and a great classical scholar, being a guest at the rectory, was instantly invited by the Heywoods to dine with his host at Beech House. Theo, now nearly sixteen, also appeared at dinner: Miss Winter was in bed with a headache. At dessert, à propos of some topic that arose, old Clarke—he looked old and unkempt, with his stock always working up at the back of his neck—quoted a line or two of Horace, whereat Theo looked up from the pear she was peeling, and electrified the company by saying in a sudden clear voice.

"I know Latin!"

"Oh, ho! a prodigy!" says Anstruther, turning to look at her. Theodora had always hated him.

With perfect confidence she quoted the half-dozen open-

ing lines of the "Ars Poetica," her mother's blue eyes staring at her quite bewildered, and her father's plainly hostile.

Clarke, who was next to her, leant forward and patted her hand. "You are such a pretty young woman," he said, "we must forgive you even your false quantities."

Then he turned and resumed his conversation with Anstruther, and Theodora, smarting, fell back on her pear.

The next morning, Miss Winter was summoned to the library, where Mrs. Heywood sat by the fire, visibly perturbed, and John Heywood stood with his back to it, trying to keep his temper. His eye, as it encountered Miss Winter's, did not indicate that the effort was going to be successful.

Then, as arranged, Mrs. Heywood spoke.

"We were vexed to find last night, Miss Winter," she said in her candid, sweet voice, "that you had been teaching Theo Latin. We did not ask you to do so, and we do not wish her to learn things like that, which will not be any good to her when she is grown up, and will only make her vain."

Here Miss Winter interposed, with a quite undisguised sneer on her lips. "I perfectly understand, of course, ma'am, that the chief aim of Theodora's education is to fit her to look well at the end of her husband's table, but . . ."

It was Madam's turn to interrupt. "We are sure she will do that," she said quite simply. "Theo is such a handsome girl; but what we want is to train her to be a good and obedient wife to him and a good mother to his children."

Miss Winter replied proudly, "I have taught her nothing, ma'am, that can do her anything but good."

On this, the leash John Heywood had put on his wrath snapped suddenly.

"Yes, you have," he said. "You've crammed a lot of stuff and nonsense down her throat which, unless I'm very much mistaken, she'll always be trying to cram down other people's. Anyhow, we didn't pay you to teach her Greek and Latin, and you must have known we didn't wish it, or

there would have been none of this deceit and subterfuge about it. In short, my wife and I are very sorry, but we must ask you to accept this in lieu of notice"—he handed her a cheque which had been lying on the mantelpiece—"and to arrange with your friends to return to them as soon as is convenient."

The cheque was for a year's salary.

Julia Winter looked at it, tore it across, and handed the pieces to her employer.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Heywood," she said. "Three months' notice or three months' salary was the arrangement we came to, I believe. I prefer to keep to it. I hope to be able to arrange to leave your house to-morrow." And with a bow, which included both the old people, she left the room, and John Heywood perfectly apoplectic with surprise and rage on the hearthrug.

Theo's heart was certainly not the strongest point in her moral anatomy, but she had become really attached to Miss Winter, who had ministered to her vanity by recognising her superiority—for it never entered into the mind of governess or pupil to doubt that they really were superior to the parent pair. In the stage-coach, on her dismal way home, poor Julia Winter, who had set all her empty heart as well as her pride on Theodora, cried quietly beneath her veil: and as the wounds of self-love smart nearly as long and as cruelly as the wounds of love, Theo remembered for years the episode of her governess' departure with a sort of proud humiliation.

After that, it may be said that the old birds, who had by mistake produced an eaglet, were always trying to fly as fast as their progeny and failing to catch her up. Once more, they consulted long and solemnly, with the result that masters came daily from Dartford and instructed Theo in history and literature, as well as in dancing, deportment, flower painting, music, and French—the French lessons, given by a courtly old Frenchman, long domiciled in this country, Nancy sharing with Theo. As Nancy was herself, on her father's

side, of French extraction, and had, so to speak, inherited the accent, she was here wholesomely Theo's superior, a superiority on which Theo retaliated by implying, with spirit, that she personally felt it unpatriotic and affected to pronounce the language of the old enemy in the fashion preferred by him. As Nancy was shortly starting for Paris to finish her education on a long visit to her relatives there, she prudently went on with her French *à la française*.

Theo was verging on young ladyhood, and had been for several months, as it were, looking about among her accomplishments for a speciality, when she decided on literature: and after much hopeful expenditure of ink, quills, paper and midnight oil, sent a vast article on Chaucer (it was, in fact, a spirited *réchauffé* of everything her schoolroom contained relative to that poet) to a certain Review.

When, six weeks later, the coach returned to her a somewhat drabbed parcel, she at once settled, partly from offended pride, but partly because she had plenty of good sense, to try a likelier *métier*: rose in the dark for six weeks to acquire harmony and counterpoint, before coming to the reluctant conclusion that her own mother was a much better musician than she would ever be herself: when she straightway took a plunge into history and politics, feeling obliged, since her father was a Tory of an aggravated description, to be a Whig, and to render him speechlessly angry by respectfully disagreeing with one or two of the most stupid and arrogant of his opinions.

It was Mrs. Heywood, the peacemaker, who threw oil, or at least soup, one day at dinner, on troubled waters by saying, in her comfortable voice, "I should like you to come with me, to-morrow, Theo, and take some of this beautiful mock-turtle of Jane's to poor old Mrs. Masters!"

Theodora had hitherto accompanied her mother on such errands only from a high sense of duty, and with her finely-cut nose a little in the air. For Miss Winter had despised, though only by implication, Madam's little charities; and it

was not until to-day—political history can be intensely boring with its bills and committees, and governments perpetually going in and out—that Theo, still groping for that satisfactory speciality, saw the germ of one in a most unexpected place.

There turned out to be infectious illness in the cottage the soup was designed for, so, while Mrs. Heywood was within, Theo was bidden to wait without. As she did so, Dr. Moor emerged from his house hard by. He was a tall young fellow, with a heavy, slouching figure, an ugly face, and a very clever head. He had no particular liking for Theodora; and, as such things are generally mutual, she had no liking for him.

There was no avoiding each other on this occasion; so she walked up and shook hands with him, and said, "Mamma is taking the Masters some soups and things: they are ill, so I am not to go in."

Moor replied, "No, I shouldn't, if I were you." Then he laughed to himself. "Soups!" he said. "Good Lord! Why, those people want first the places they live in pulled down over their ears—and that wouldn't be any good unless you could build them new morals and constitutions as well as new cottages. They're pretty well eaten up down here with rheumatism and low fever—and a damned lot of much uglier things than that—" (It pleased Moor sometimes to speak as it was natural to him to speak for the sake of calling up a certain prim corrective look he knew on Miss Heywood's face.) "Soups!" and he laughed again; then whistled softly to himself, and stared across the river.

Theo, interested, said quickly, "I don't think the religious influences here can be nearly strong enough!"

And Moor retorted, "Religious influence? Rebuild the cottages! Not that the people *want* 'em rebuilt! You get used to degradations like dirt and drink, you know, Miss Heywood, till you come to like 'em." He poked at the ground with his stick, and then went on staring across the river.

The brisk note in Theodora's young voice was designed to recall a wandering attention. "You have no right to!" she said. "The people should be properly guided! Of course I understand very well that mama's little kindnesses in the way of jellies and beef-tea are ineffectual, as she nearly always forgets to make them contingent on good behaviour and——"

Moor turned his head and interrupted unceremoniously, "Ineffectual! Not a bit of it! They are the one thing the poor wretches really enjoy: and they love your mother, she's so pretty and comfortable. Don't run away with that impression, Miss Heywood. If your mother never came near them they'd lose one of their few pleasures."

Theodora said coldly, "Only little pleasures do not make people morally better, unfortunately."

And Moor, looking at her at last with a smile which redeemed his plain and heavy face, said, "No! Nor the tongues and efforts of men—or angels either, sometimes, Miss Theo."

That episode simmered in Theodora's active and unoccupied mind.

At Christmas—the Christmas before David King returned from sea to find the Gables no longer his home—Anstruther gave his usual dance at the rectory. Thereat, Theodora, now more than eighteen years old, made her début.

Though it is true she was not really at her handsomest until an age when most women's good looks are on the wane, and that her air of self-confidence and dignity fitted her much better at eight and thirty than at eighteen, it is also true that at the earlier age she was a beautiful girl, with her tall slender figure, her pale clear skin, and her handsome eyes, which were melancholy but not dreamy—on the contrary, full of keenness, energy and intelligence. Her personal untidiness and that indifference, or assumed indifference, to her appearance had long been a thorn in the flesh of a mother who was no more ashamed of a natural pride in her clothes than in her linen cupboard and her larder: when the present

ball came on the *tapis* Mrs. Heywood may be said to have been wholly nonplussed by a daughter who said, "Just as you like, mama!" with an air of respectful apathy when required to make the choice between the two muslins suggested for her frock for the great occasion. Likewise, on the eventful night itself, Theo had made a point of declining to take longer than usual over her toilette, and ostentatiously read a history book while old Louisa was brushing and curling her hair.

John Heywood was called in from his dressing-room presently to see Theo, as she stood on a sheet to protect her satin shoes (looking rather like a young swan with her long neck, in the soft whiteness of her muslins), recklessly illuminated by candles set, not only on the great mahogany dressing-table, but on the mantelpiece and on chairs all about the room, and with the maidservants, gathered at the door to look at her, reduced to the most flattering gasps of admiration. Old Louisa came out of the group and patted her nursling on the back and said, "You're quite the grown-up young lady now, Miss Theo!"

Mrs. Heywood, herself full of the heartiest delight and excitement, turned to Janet, also an old family friend, and said, "*Doesn't* Miss Theo look nice, Janet?" And Miss Theo herself stood, not a little self-conscious, but with a faintly disdainful smile on her face, as of one who takes balls and parties at their low, just valuation. John Heywood felt, as Sarah Burchell had felt when Theo was a little girl, a strong mistrust of the unnatural detachment of this attitude, while he at the same time inconsistently resented it as an affectation. There were dark moments when his daughter reminded him of an elder sister of his own—a good-looking woman, whose portrait hung on the staircase at Beech House—who had taken the key of the fields, declined matrimony, and settled alone in a far country, like the prodigal of the parable and Lady Hester Stanhope.

If Theodora was not the most popular person at the dance, she was certainly its belle. Anstruther came up and paid

her the elaborate compliments then in vogue, which Theo, who always suspected him of a hidden sarcasm, received with dignity. Even Archibald Forrest, who was chiefly preoccupied in keeping himself and his wife—a colourless, thin woman—out of draughts and the other menaces to health provided by balls, was stirred to a momentary forgetfulness of these important points by Miss Heywood's good looks, and remarked very truly, after he had led her out to a quadrille, that she had a distinction quite lacking to her parents and that there must be good blood somewhere. A closer observer than Archibald—Miss Burchell—said *sotto voce* to her host as they stood watching a very pretty and animated scene.

"I tell you, Richard, that girl's never natural! She's always posing—for her own benefit or some one else's."

Whereat Anstruther, screwing up his eyes, made reply, "She's too handsome, Sarah. You're jealous."

And Sarah said, "Fudge!"

It was to maintain for her own benefit, as much as for anyone else's, her rôle of being a young person out of the common run, that that evening, on returning home, Theo at once put her little tight bouquet on the fire, knowing her mother had carefully treasured the brown and decayed remains of the nosegay which had accompanied *her* to *her* first party: and it was in the same spirit, and because her parents had suggested that a longer rest in bed was permissible, that Theo rose firmly at her usual time the next morning and pursued her usual study of history for an hour before breakfast, arriving at that meal and dispensing its coffee with the slightly superior manner inevitable in one who has been early and virtuously employed towards two who have not.

Just one week after the dance, about five o'clock on a murky February evening, as Theo and her parents were waiting for dinner gathered about the drawing-room fire, which made the sole splash of colour in the room, enter to them Anstruther, in pink after a day with the fox-hounds, tired

and mud-stained, and yet keeping some of that spruceness and trimness which were always characteristic of both his mind and his body.

He shook hands, stopped Heywood's hospitable suggestions of dinner with a "No, no! Many thanks. I haven't come to dinner or to ask this young woman how many hearts she broke last Thursday," and he looked at Theo with the expression she hated; "I've some bad news, I'm sorry to say. Our old friend Charles Forrest was found dead in his bed two mornings ago in his Brixton house. Heart, it is supposed. Well, well, he was a good friend to us all was Charles Forrest."

Anstruther's keen eyes, in repose very melancholy, softened: he paused, then, as it were, recovered himself and the other side of his nature.

"Rumour has it," he said, "I don't know how truly, that he has left the Grey Priory and twenty thousand pounds to his great-nephew David King, who's a sailor, and that the mother is to come here at once and look after the house for him. Archibald's got three parts of his father's property—and finely disgusted, they say, at not having the whole": and Anstruther chuckled and enjoyed himself.

CHAPTER VI

A GOODLY HERITAGE

LET the cynics say what they will, it is not every man who loves money: indifference to it may run in a family, as much as a talent for making it or an inability to keep it, and, here and there, does exist the rare being who regards a fortune as a misfortune.

David King was certainly in this category when, the Gables' door having been shut blankly in his face, Mr. Gilmour put his head over the box-hedge which divided the two front gardens and gave him the information which Richard Anstruther had imparted two months earlier to the Heywoods at Beech House.

A quick and warm regret for old Uncle Charles, whom he had liked and who he had felt (with that instinct which only the conceited need mistrust) had really liked him, was succeeded in David's mind by a sudden dark suspicion that wealth was somehow going to interfere with his life at sea, and a gloomy wish that Uncle Charles' kindness had been otherwise displayed. It was not until James Gilmour had divined this singular attitude, and, pushing his spectacles on to his forehead in the old fashion, the better to study one who appeared indeed to be a freak of nature, exclaimed, "Lord save the man! Doesn't want twenty thousand pounds! Well, if *you* don't want it, think how comfortable it'll make your mother—confound you!" that David, with a slow smile coming on to his face, admitted two sides to the question.

As he and Gilmour sat over the fire which the chill in the April wind made pleasant, in Gilmour's familiar little par-

lour, David, inquiring if his mother had been herself pleased, drew from Mr. Gilmour that of course she had. Then, "She's so soft-hearted, your mother—she didn't like leaving the old house and all that: and your father's grave being here, that upset her a bit: but she was uncommon pleased for you—thinking *you'd* be pleased—as you ought to be, Davie, confound you: as you certainly ought to be": and Mr. Gilmour polished up his spectacles exactly as David remembered him doing before hanging them, to the youthful Davie's great entertainment, on the youthful Davie's button nose.

Still, even the thought, much insisted on by James Gilmour, that David would now be able to give his mother the luxuries and comforts to which she had been accustomed in her girlhood and make life easy for her, hardly consoled him: he was so simple a person that when he felt depressed, he seemed so: when his host asked for a description of the last voyage, King merely replied it had been pretty fair—dirty weather coming up Channel—and relapsed instantly into silence.

However, after a good night's rest—ending with a dream of his parents both aboard the "Princess Amelia" in company with old Captain Margetson and Fraser—David woke to one of those clean, clear, cool April mornings on which it is impossible not to hope.

It is true that, being of a mind not readily swayed by others, the fact of his old friend, young Michael, looking in after breakfast on his way to his solicitors' office to tell David what a lucky dog he was, did not make him think himself so, as such congratulations do most of us.

But, on the testimony of those who tried it, there were few more delightful sensations in life than a long drive on a fine morning on a stage-coach: and when David, having parted from James Gilmour in Southwark, found himself on the top of the Dartford "Rover," he began to enjoy himself. Having disposed of his own modest valise in the foreboot, he had, on mounting to his seat, got everything ship-shape in

his immediate neighbourhood in his neat and silent sailor fashion, and on to terms, without undue expenditure of words, with his neighbours. His left-hand one, a stout elderly merchant, looked at him sharply up and down once or twice; then said, "Glad to be ashore again, sir?" and David, who would have said "No" and left the matter there twelve hours earlier, replied that he was.

The Kentish cherry orchards, as they skimmed past them, were white with blossom, like snow. Here, nestled a comfortable farm: there, one of the homely villages, with its old grey church and fruitful cottage gardens, typically English: the spring hedges had just burst into green: little clouds hurried across the blue breast of the sky: and the spring wind was keen. He would have been no Englishman who did not rejoice to be in England under such conditions: and David was British, as the Britons who follow his calling nearly always are, to the very marrow of his bones.

When Dartford was reached and the other passengers streamed into the bar of the "Bull and George," David, having tipped guard and coachman, took his luggage in his hand and started briskly on his two-mile walk. As he entered Inglethorpe village, the flowering fields, growing towards the hay-harvest, were replaced here and there by substantial houses with plenty of well-kept garden to keep them select from the world: on the hill above him stood St. Mary's, like a hoary sentinel: presently his eye caught, shining in the sun, the silver streak of the river: then, standing well above it, of a low wide house with a tower and a garden of lawns and flowers; then, fields sloping to the water: a large grey gateway: and, behold, his inheritance!

The Grey Priory, which still stands to the south of the high road to Dover, was, according to one story, built in the reign of Stephen and held for that king or for the Empress Maud: while, according to another, it dates from the time of Edward III. and was "no designed place of strength but only a castellated mansion." Tradition, often more faithful to

fact than the history book, asserts that it only became a religious house in the reign of Henry VII., then changing its name of the Stonehouse to the Grey Priory. At the dissolution of the monasteries it passed into the possession of one Chapman, a "merchant adventurer"; in the late seventeenth century belonged to an archdeacon of Rochester, who bequeathed it and a farm to "certain charitable uses." It was then vested in trustees, who finally sold it to Charles Forrest, who had settled into it on his marriage, which was a wealthy one, and thereafter made it his country home for life.

As David King first saw it there only remained, as there still remains, of the original building one square grey tower of immense thickness, with a winding staircase within it running from the cellar to the roof. On the old stone-work in this tower may still be seen the arms of the Northwood family, its original owners: and in the cellar is a blocked doorway, always supposed, but not proved, to open on a subterranean passage, ending under the altar of the parish church. For the rest, the tower contains two charming rooms: the lower one, still known as the Castle room, had been little Archibald Forrest's schoolroom; the one above, his nursery.

The remainder of the house was two-storied, not large, with low pleasant rooms, which seemed to keep the sunshine long after the sun was off them. Here, some old Northwood, perhaps, had thrown out a fat bow: there, his madam, of a Frenchified taste, had insisted on long windows to the ground. The high wooden mantelpieces had the rare beauty of unadornment; everywhere the professional decorator had known how to stay his hand, or had never been allowed his head: the brief staircase was wide, shallow stepped, and of oak; the small square hall panelled to its carved ceiling.

Yet, after all, with houses as with human beings it is as much their inconsistencies as their virtues which make them

lovable. King's Priory had steps where steps could only be as a practical joke to overthrow the unwary: there was an amazing zigzag of a turret staircase leading to the servants' sleeping quarters, which implied, if the dining-room took too much, the servants, if they ever reached their beds, must have been of a sobriety absolutely unimpeachable. The dining-room led into the drawing-room: one bedroom had enough cupboards to contain the wardrobe of Queen Elizabeth, and another had none at all. To counteract its failings and crown its delights, nearly every window in the house had not only sunshine and the charming view across the garden and fields to the river, but—what the most exquisite landscape lacking, lacks the finishing touch—life. In the distance were the river cottages, with their red tiled roofs and busy smoke curling up from the chimneys; one could hear from the Priory garden, in a softened distance, the voices of children, the passing carts on the road; while up and down the river—leaden or silver, as the sky frowned or smiled—moved the ships and the barges.

As David turned into the gateway, a horrid fear momentarily clouded his mind lest his great-uncle should have left him not only substance, but show: and somehow have managed to include in his benefactions that immaculate butler of his, whom King remembered as always offering to do what one had much rather—and much better—do for oneself, and watching, like a polite lynx, every mouthful one put in one's mouth.

But when he had rung the bell and turned to look at his domain, it was old Susan who struck him smartly on the back as usual, and said, "Well, here you are at last, Master Davie! Isn't this a fine come-up for us all?" And in the hall was his mother, with her cheeks flushed and her eyes brightened almost into youth again, and saying it really all seemed like a fairy tale. That generally has an ogre in its castle, but this castle had none.

Charles Forrest had left his nephew not only a house, but

a home—his own home, as he had lived in it and left it; with portraits of his and David's plain ancestors, with long noses and periwigs, in the hall; with the deep leather chairs in the library, worn with the impress of Uncle Charles' comfortable person, and the carpets with the tread of his gouty feet; and the great book-cases full of the best standard works in calf which Forrest, like many of us, had been perfectly content to admire from without. To make all complete, there, in a corner, was yet another bookcase, the shabby one from the Gables, with the delightful "Voyages of Captain Cook," and of David's boyhood, and now a fat work on astronomy, presented as a parting present to Mrs. King by her sincere friend James Gilmour—her sincere friend, no doubt, realising she was as likely to read it as she was to read Arabic.

In the drawing-room, with its low ceiling and deep bow window, his mother drew David towards a portrait of a blue-eyed, feeble lady, almost all head-dress, and said in a hushed voice, "That was Archibald's mother, Davie. But they did say it was *my* mother Uncle Charles wanted to marry."

Before a smaller picture of a very dear little Archibald (a fair child in a tunic, with a ball) she paused, and said with a sigh, out-heroding Herod, "It *does* seem a pity children live to grow up!" then pressed David's arm and laughed at herself a little.

Presently David, prompted to the thought by something James Gilmour had said, asked how Archibald had liked the division of his father's property, and Camilla, with that mixture of earnestness and simplicity which made her attractive, replied, "Oh! not at all! He came to see me at the Gables just after dear Uncle Charles' funeral, and I could see was quite hurt about it: so I asked Mr. Gilmour if we hadn't better give him your share back again, and he said—you know how abrupt dear James Gilmour can be in his manner sometimes!—that it would be the act of a fool and was not to be thought of, and that I must recollect

Archibald had not scrupled to take property your grandfather ought to have left to me!"

Twenty-four hours earlier, King would have been by no means so sure it would have been the act of a fool: now he only laughed, and, looking round the charming, low-pitched room, said he supposed it couldn't be done, and Archibald was certainly rich enough himself.

Camilla said, "Oh! quite, dear, quite!" in an absent voice. "And your cousin Adelaide too! Quite, I think." Then she added, "We won't live like rich people, David. Henry so disliked being waited on, and I do too now—I'm so out of the way of it"; à propos she added, "Susan says she can manage here beautifully with two girls under her."

David said, "That's a blessing," much relieved, and the dismal spectre of the butler was laid for ever.

Presently, when his mother had suggested exploring the next floor, David chose thereon a small slip of a bedroom, which had been Archibald's when first promoted from a nurse and a night nursery, and had a narrow uncurtained bed and no trimmings whatever. He fetched his light and shabby portmanteau from the hall and, as his mother sat on the one chair of the room, unpacked, in about five minutes, his whole modest trousseau: placed on the dressing-table the worn-down brush with a shaky D carved on it by his unauthorised youthful hand, and looking round said, "This will do capitally for me when I'm at home!"

While she was resting in her room for an hour before dinner, he went round his estate. The gardens were modest in size. The old Scotch autocrat who had ruled them had retired, on Charles Forrest's death, on an annuity; the second in command was a youngish yokel with a red forelock, which he pulled at constant intervals as he walked round the grounds with his new master and explained things.

An elderly tortoise was sauntering round the high-walled kitchen garden by himself; in the fields, three or four Alderney cows raised their beautiful heads as if to say, "Here

you are: we expected you," and went on dining; in the stable-yard there was a dog, Philip—mongrel, but affectionate and sensible, and loudly demanding to be taken for a walk; in the stables the pair of fat carriage horses which were to drive his mother (but, David took a solemn, silent vow, himself as rarely as possible), and Forrest's mare, who nosed up to her new master to ask for her accustomed sugar. The old coachman, Barnes—in face and figure not unlike Uncle Charles himself—was pleased to approve of that new master's firm and modest demeanour; Jones, the gardener, perceived that, if he had found a chief, he had found a working partner too; there was hardly anything David liked better about his inheritance than the fact that it promised him scope for his own energies: his quick and quiet eye noted that evening various small gardening jobs to which he could set his hand in the morning, for he had not only learnt something of gardening at the Gables, but had even hopefully cultivated a plot on board ship, about the size of a pocket handkerchief—not relinquishing that attempt at horticulture until the garden had, for the fourth time, been blown bodily into the sea.

At last, he walked through the fields to the water which made his land perfectly desirable. A heavy barge and a small ship under full sail were coming slowly down stream: two or three children were playing on the farther shore: in the distance could be heard the voices of some men hauling in a boat: and—to the amateur—that was all. But as the botanist sees in the meanest flower that blows, marvels and a life-history hidden from the common eye: as Gilmour desecrated a world in a star which to Camilla was the feeblest twinkle of a nightlight, so to her son the river was full of voices and histories, bore on its bosom some of the sea-life he loved, and would keep for him when he was old the days of his youth.

There was a low wall dividing his goodly heritage from the shingly shore, whereon King espied, and was espied by,

an elderly man with a ragged jersey, a tanned face and a calm eye, smoking, with his large hands in his vast pockets, seemingly idle, and seeing and noting everything. King instantly perceived that his new acquaintance, like himself, "used the sea"; with the freemasonry which links the men, of any race and of every clime, whose business is in great waters, they at once understood each other, and with the least possible expenditure of words began a friendship which, far from requiring the artificial stimulus of intercourse, was resumed perfectly unimpaired after David had been away six, ten, or twenty months by a nod on either side.

On the present occasion they spoke about the whence and whither of a little craft which presently appeared, and then silently watched her on her way. When she was lost to view, old Sowerby said, very suddenly, "Good night to ye!" and went off without excuse and because he wanted to go. King said, "Good night," and stayed awhile because he wanted to stay. Not many months later, a certain well-meaning busy-body informed him that old Sowerby was a disreputable person and very frequently intoxicated; and King, whose life had taught him a large tolerance, and that many a good man has bad faults, said, "I daresay he is," unruffled: and the friendship proceeded.

That good Uncle Charles, to make his gift perfect and complete, had left in the Priory a fat cellar, with Crofts' ports softly mellowing in pipes, Château Margaux, sealed green, ripening for the next generation, and plenty of good wines imploring to be drunk on the premises—then and there, at once—lest, being just a little too young when Forrest died, they should, unperceived, as it were, turn the corner and, like a ripe beauty, wake one morning to find themselves *passée*.

David, like his father, was the most temperate of men: but ignorance of the worth and properties of wine was in his days considered merely stupid, like other ignorances: Uncle Charles' cellar, as much as his money, house and grounds,

was there to be well used. So Susan, with a tallow dip, and King, with the cellar-book, had soon explored the richly furnished vaults, and at dessert that night he and his mother drank gravely to the kind old giver's memory in a port, pale ruby in colour, and clinging tenderly to the sides of the handsome cut wine-glasses—a nectar fit for the gods. Camilla had moved her seat next to David's: the windows were open to the ground: and the light just beginning to wane.

She looked all round the room, and sighed contentedly. "This will be a beautiful home for your wife and children, Davie!"

David laughed. "That's looking much too far ahead!"

She seemed not to hear. "You must choose very carefully," she said. "You must find some one much more—capable and experienced than I was when I was married."

Says David, speaking the truth gathered from his childish instincts and recollections, "I don't think my father wanted you to be capable and experienced: he liked you much better as you were."

And, very touched and pleased, she answered, "Oh, do you think he did?"

They did not speak again, and she presently got up and left him alone. He sat for about five minutes, fingering the stem of his wine-glass, thinking of what she had said, and trying to visualise a wife to be. Entirely failing in the endeavour, he rose, went out of the long window into the garden, and seeing there a trail of creeper torn from the wall made a mental note to be up and at it betimes on the morrow.

By noon on that day, however, conscience and his mother bade him relinquish that greatest of human pleasures, "the improvement of something we can call our own," to do his duty and call on his cousin Archibald and his wife at Inglethorpe Place.

Inglethorpe Place stood grandly on the summit of the hill, and was a fine estate where the Priory was merely charm-

ing and homely—that word now always used by the upper classes as a term of contempt, and by the lower, more wisely and correctly, as a high encomium.

As David mounted he came into view of the beautiful stiff gardens—lawns with cut yew hedges, and wide borders gay with tulips—and then of the grand old mansion itself; and once again naïvely reflected that Archibald, having himself so much, could hardly grudge his cousin his comparatively little. Whereas, of course, Forrest, like most people, loved possessions not for the use of them, but for the sense of them—“*Ce chien est à moi . . . c’est là ma place au soleil.*”

Not at all deficient in observation, King perceived at once when his cousin, who was walking in the gardens with a thin woman and a tall, broad-shouldered man, detached himself from their party and came to greet him that the old hostility, which he remembered as Archibald’s chief characteristic on that eventful evening at Cedar Lodge (the only occasion on which they had ever met), was there now, in an accentuated form.

Archibald Forrest suffered from really delicate health and a really sensitive nervous system: and his deeply wrinkled brow, anxious eyes and chronic fretfulness were, no doubt, as much the result of his physical condition as of the fact that his life had been so unfortunately fortunate as to leave him plenty of freedom from real troubles to worry over imaginary ones. Thus, he was always convinced that the government of his country was exclusively and purposely engaged in pushing her into a bottomless pit of ruin; and the member who declared that the passing of the great Reform Bill would “undermine the British constitution, destroy the established church, and deliver up the country to boundless anarchy and fearful bloodshed” was mild and cheerful in his anticipations compared with Forrest. Yet, all the same, he was no fool: indeed, where his own interests were concerned, shrewd enough.

Though he certainly would never have married Miss Adelaide Wilford if she had not been Miss Wilford, endowed with a handsome fortune and Inglethorpe Place, it would hardly be true to say that when he had married her he had merely extended the zone of his selfishness to include her within it, for he was, so far as his cold nature allowed, an affectionate husband. She was herself a weakly person, with a long nose and a deprecating air: no colour in hair or face, and clothes always selected to match them.

After briefly greeting his nephew—looking him up and down with the worried eyes which would have seen much more if they had not been so constantly turned on himself—Forrest suggested they should walk round the garden, and before they caught up the pair in front of them, asked,

“Have you met Moor? He’s the doctor—lives by the river in that red house next to Miss Burchell—a most objectionable woman. Moor’s the son of the old ‘pothecary my father used to be so fond of, and a clever fellow, or so people say. Dr. Graham, the man at Dartford, is much more reliable; for I must say,” added Forrest, lowering his voice and speaking momentarily, “the views Moor holds on the gastric juices are *extraordinary—most extraordinary!*”

David, whose views on the gastric juices, if he had held any, would doubtless have been more extraordinary still, only said, “Are they? He’s a fine-looking man!” Then, as they paused, “You have a splendid view up here.”

Dr. Johnson said that no man was qualified to be a poet who had never seen a mountain, and certainly no landscape attains sublimity without them. But the view on which Inglethorpe Place looked down—the little clustering cottages, embosomed now in vivid new green, the substantial houses of substantial persons, the lush meadows of waving grasses, and the intertwining river—had a modest and domestic beauty, very grateful to the eye.

Forrest cast an anxious glance on the scene. “Yes—it is pretty enough,” he said. “But we are not out of reach of

the miasmas from the water, I am sorry to say: one can actually see the fog-banks rolling up the hill."

King, who knew a thing or two about fog-banks from a wide personal experience, was misguided enough to reply that these afflictions must be much more felt on the flat, and understood, as he was meant to understand by the dryness of his cousin's "No doubt!" that interlopers could not be choosers, and must put up with miasmas and fog-banks as best they could.

Then they caught up Mrs. Forrest and her companion.

When the mutual introductions were complete, King thought he liked Moor, with his slouch, and his clever head, and his eyes at once observant, lazy and melancholy. Mrs. Forrest also, David thought he rather liked: she seemed to like him: as perhaps, long ago, she would have liked sons of her own, if they had not been so certain to upset her own health and her husband's equilibrium.

The four went presently into the house, and David was shown the historic room where Cardinal Wolsey had eaten, and, above it, the panelled chamber where he had slept. Moor, who had doubtless seen these treasures before, affected no interest in them, and looked absently out of the window.

When they had returned to the drawing-room, Forrest, knowing, of course, his pearls were being cast before swine, indicated a few of the more valuable of the pictures and the china to David: David admired what he understood, adding, quite unnecessarily, "I'm afraid I don't know anything at all about these things," and, with that natural modesty which is not ashamed of ignorance, would not have minded in the least if Archibald Forrest had replied with his lips, and not only in his heart, "No, my dear fellow, indeed you don't!"

The luncheon of wine, sandwiches and cake the guests eat in a dining parlour, with five or six admirable ancestral portraits looking down on the ceremony. Diets were not yet: but by much not unintelligent observation of their own in-

ternal economy, Forrest and his wife had arrived at the conclusion that most of the meats and drinks so carelessly and gaily imbibed by ordinary persons were, to themselves, poisonous: and they were so much in advance of their age that they found one of the greatest interests of their lives in denying themselves this, testing that, and anxiously watching for results.

Forrest now cut a large, rich cake, with a gloomy, "Will you venture on this?" to the guests. They ventured—King's experiences at sea having accustomed him to digestive experiments infinitely more perilous, and Moor perhaps being of the opinion that "life and health are too strong forts to be taken by such pop-gun artillery" as a plum cake.

The two young men walked homewards down the hill together, and had exchanged a very few remarks before David had made up his mind that "people" were right, and the young doctor was an able fellow. His father, indeed, though but a village apothecary, had so profited by the passion of the laity for drugs—there were not a few of them who, like Gibbon, "swallowed nearly as much physic as food"—that he had amassed in time a sufficient fortune to enter his son at the united Hospital of Guy and St. Thomas, where the great Sir Astley Cooper was giving the lectures on surgery: Young Peter, a very wild dog of a medical student, was such an uncommonly clever young dog too that he passed the College of Surgeons and the Apothecaries' Society with high honour; became apothecary to the Westminster General Dispensary, and when Inglethorpe was prophesying for him a brilliant career in London, surprised it by returning to the village and taking up the dull domestic practice just left vacant by the death of his father. Old Mr. Moor, with his gold-rimmed spectacles on his dear old nose, compounding his abominations with a pestle and mortar in his shop, had been much more popular in Inglethorpe than his far shrewder son, who drugged little, said little, and had effected some remarkable cures.

Being of few words himself, King did not find silence in others irksome.

As they neared the village, Moor pointed and said, "That's my house, next to Miss Burchell's—an uncommon clever old girl, Miss Burchell" (that was the second opinion of her David had heard that day). "I'm in by four as a rule. Look in if you're passing."

King responded by inviting Moor to dine, and they parted at the gate of the Grey Priory with a friendly nod and a mutual liking.

David had not been two minutes in the drawing-room with his mother, describing his visit, when ominous sounds of wheels on the drive, and a slight bustle in the hall, warned them they were caught by a surprise attack from visitors: and before David, who was neat and quick in action, had had time to take any, Bridget opened the drawing-room door with "Mrs. and Miss Heywood"—and the enemy was upon them.

Mrs. Heywood's zest for life extended to calls, which she knew under the euphemism of "seeing one's friends" and really enjoyed, as she enjoyed driving in the great barouche with the fat, slow horses, with their shaking sides, and old Davis, the coachman of twenty years' standing, turning on his box, when the spirit moved him, to join in his employers' conversation. The modern young woman in Theo's place declines *in toto* to pay calls at all when she feels she could be better (which is, more congenially) employed: but if Theo despised her parents, it was perfectly dutifully. When Mrs. Heywood suggested visiting, or driving into Dartford to match her Berlin wools, Theo said, "Certainly, mama, I will be ready at three," and compensated herself for that submission by feeling superior—which is a very real consolation, as anyone knows who has tried it.

To-day, while Mrs. Heywood and Mrs. King chatted on the sofa, David found himself *tête-à-tête* with an extremely handsome and rather *farouche* young woman, who held her-

self with great stateliness, wore her handsome clothes with a sort of studied carelessness as if they did not belong to her, and was at first not only dignified but more than a little self-conscious. "Le moindre affectation est un vice," and a vice for which the perfectly natural have the least toleration.

When King came to the end of the usual banalities about the weather, he considered the carpet in perfect silence, and in his mind how long afternoon calls were warranted to last.

Then Camilla interrupted her chat with Mrs. Heywood to say, "David, dear, do take Miss Heywood to see the garden!" Walking there by the river the conversation most happily turned on King's voyage to the Bermudas. Theodora had just been reading a book on the subject of the islands, and was really interested and admirably *au fait* in it. Her affectations dropped from her: she was ardent and highly intelligent: a beautiful flush came on the beautiful pallor of her face as she talked: David threw in now and again a confirmation, from experience, of her book knowledge, or put in, as it were, a figure on the canvas, and as he did so, observed—not knowing till after that he had observed—how finely her black hair swept away from her cheek and forehead, and what a charming light the rose lining of her straw bonnet shed on her animated face.

It was that master detective of human motive, La Rochefoucauld, who said that we dislike conceit in others because it wounds our own. King had none of his own. He respected his companion for knowing in many ways twice as much as he did about the history of a place he had seen and she had not. Once, when she went astray, he looked up to say something: catching sight of her face bethought himself it did not matter, and did not correct her. She was half a head taller than he was in physical height: he recognised in her nature something finer and bolder than he had supposed was in the natures of most women: while, on her side, she liked his open face and his unassuming modesty.

When Mrs. King came out of the French windows and

suggested wine and biscuits, Miss Heywood refused at once, quite decidedly, and was deep again in a second in her conversation with King. Twenty minutes later, as he found himself packing the visitors into their carriage, he doubted if, after all, calls were such a wholly objectionable institution as he had supposed them to be. Miss Heywood smiled at him with a dignified friendliness over the custard pudding she was nursing and a jar of rich soup (mercifully set), which she had to steady with a hand—these dainties being *en route* from Mrs. Heywood's generous heart and kitchen to poor old Miss Potter, Theo's first governess, at Dartford. It must be allowed that Theodora had her trials.

There were so many farewells that old Davis turned round on his box to say, "You'll be late, ma'am, if we don't get away." Mrs. Heywood, taking the suggestion in the excellent part in which it was offered, they got away. As the barouche disappeared down the drive, David and his mother turned into the garden.

"Mrs. Heywood seems a dear old lady," she said, "so pretty with her pink cheeks and her white hair! Did you like the daughter, Davie?"

David, looking straight in front of him with his steady young eyes, replied, Yes, he did.

"Did you?" rose in his mind, but some instinct kept it from his lips.

Then, as they strolled on, he began telling her about the Forrests.

CHAPTER VII

THE VALLEY OF DECISION

JUST a fortnight after King's arrival in Inglethorpe, Anstruther gave a dinner party at the rectory, and arriving downstairs, as the good host should, a quarter of an hour before the guests were expected, found one of them—to wit, his cousin Sarah Burchell—already seated in his drawing-room, with a capacious work-bag on her knees, sewing briskly.

In the old coach days, when no one could steam away to the great towns to find there their friends, their work or their pleasure, a fair-sized country village was perhaps the most sociable place on earth. In Inglethorpe, for instance, if the Heywoods gave a dinner party one week, the Clutterbucks instantly retaliated the next with one of their famous lobster suppers: the Archibald Forrests, not naturally given to an ungrudging hospitality, were compelled to make return for that so constantly offered to them: even Miss Burchell, who could make no return, had sometimes half a dozen cards and notes of invitation adorning her chimney-piece: while Anstruther's most efficient housekeeper, Mrs. Wilkins, always very properly reminded him when he had dined three times at a neighbour's for twice that neighbour had dined with him.

He held out the round fat watch which hung on his fob as he approached his guest, and said, "Fifteen minutes too soon, Sarah!"

To which Miss Burchell, nodding at him as she continued her work, replied, "I meant to be." Then, after a pause,

still working and without raising her eyes, she said, "I wanted to know how you found Emmeline."

Anstruther threw up his hands with a gesture of despair. He used many such gestures: the lines on his plain, shrewd face, with its large nose and penetrating eyes, deepened as he said, "Oh, well enough, and happy enough too. One ought to be thankful it is so. Poor thing! Poor thing!"

He walked across to the window and looked out with melancholy eyes, which did not see it, across his rose garden, famous even in a county of fair gardens.

"She was playing with a doll," he went on, as if the words came to him with difficulty. "She hardly turned her head when I came in. It is impossible now to get a rational word out of her. I gave it up. Poor Emmeline! Poor Emmeline!" His eyes took a deeper melancholy: but indeed it was not Emmeline who was to be pitied, but the man who, in his early vigorous manhood, had found himself tied for life to a wife with an incurable mental affliction.

Anstruther, after a career at Oxford not wilder than that of most of his compeers, had left it at two and twenty without taking his degree; had shot, fished and hunted from his father's place in South Wales until, sobering somewhat, he had been ordained to a fat family living at Pontyrant, in Beaconsire, marrying at the same time the pretty, flighty young woman—an only daughter with a comfortable fortune to her portion—whom his father had chosen for him. The flightiness rapidly developed into alarming eccentricity. Sarah Burchell, then earning her living as a governess, returned on a certain yearly holiday to the parsonage in an adjacent village, where her father was starving as a perpetual curate, to find her cousin Richard's wife the talk of the neighbourhood, and Anstruther himself a greatly broken man. Sarah Burchell was not only a very attractive young woman in those days, but, as she remained all her life, of great vigour, vivacity and originality of character. She never forgot that autumn morning when Richard paced the lawn be-

fore the Pontyrrant vicarage at her side, and told her that the London doctors had finally advised that poor Emmeline should be removed from home, that her physical health seemed to promise long life, and that her mental condition would alter, if at all, for the worse.

As they walked, Richard Anstruther, with his hands behind his back and his sombre eyes fixed on the ground, once and only once raised them to his cousin's face. "You know how it was, Sally," he said. "My father wished the marriage—the money-bags tempted him, and—God forgive me!—they tempted me. Well, I pay now—I pay now! I should like to think no one else has to pay, too."

Sarah Burchell looked straight before her, very steadily. "What you and I have to do, Richard," she said, "is first of all to see that Emmeline shan't pay, and that you get the very best done for her that can be done. Then, if you ask me—which you haven't—what *you'd* better do, I should say, change your living and make a fresh start elsewhere."

Anstruther did not answer, nor seem to hear. Fortune, as well as his parents, had spoilt him, and when she crossed him, he groaned aloud and thought no doubt first of himself. Yet Sarah Burchell at least knew that his selfishness concealed warm affections, and his caustic tongue a very feeling heart.

Eventually he took her advice: supplementing it by appointing her old father to the living of Pontyrrant, while he himself bought that of Inglethorpe. Mr. Burchell lived to enjoy his better fortunes but a very few years. His daughter, because she needs must, went on with her teaching until his death and that of her elder married sister, left her with a pittance and the charge of a little niece, Nancy Legard. Then, for once, Sarah Burchell had relaxed the rule of her life never to accept money from anyone, and least of all from Richard Anstruther, and took from him as a gift the white wooden cottage at Inglethorpe, which was to be her home for the rest of her days. Emmeline was placed in a luxurious es-

tablishment at Richmond, where constantly Anstruther, and sometimes Sarah Burchell, went to see her.

The Church of England in that day was generally less neglectful of its duties than the Church of England of this day chooses to suppose. Its parsons, mostly the "little brothers of the rich," did, as one of them put it, "their formal and exacted duties" well enough, and its dominant note was not indifference, but a certain "quiet worldliness." Anstruther was undoubtedly a man of the world, but he had, not the less, deep down in him a vein of strong religious feeling. He was also energetic, enterprising and orderly. The "music" in the gallery which, in Mr. Greene's time, had spent most of its own in audibly squabbling and shuffling its feet, became in Anstruther's a loud, vigorous and self-respecting band: he re-upholstered at his own expense many of the moth-eaten old pews: instituted stoves in the winter: caused the aged clerk to have his hair cut and his coat brushed, and to throw in his "A-mon, A-mon" more or less in the right places: while in the pulpit Anstruther surprised, and at first offended, his audience by sermons sharp, short and very plain spoken. He was not a scholar—as Mr. Greene had been, to the great loss and inconvenience of his congregation—but he had a very fair knowledge of human nature and plenty of courage. It would be too much perhaps to say that his parishioners loved him: for simple people always suspect the sarcasm in which he indulged freely: but they liked him and respected him for his honesty, and for his generosity when they were sick or sorry, and—as human nature is the same in fustian as in broadcloth—for his wealth, his well-appointed house, his well-filled stables, and his smart phaeton, in which he drove himself all over the county.

In time, he became really interested in the business and interests of his position—and as Sarah Burchell had hoped, they eased a little the weight of that heavy millstone for ever about his neck.

When David King became lord of the Grey Priory, Rich-

ard Anstruther had been some eighteen years in Inglethorpe, had filled the church to the brim, brought his parish to what was then considered a high state of perfection, and was himself one of the social features of the neighbourhood.

Miss Burchell's needlework had dropped to the floor as Anstruther spoke: after a short silence she picked it up, looked at her cousin, who was still standing by the window gazing out of it, re-threaded her needle, and changed the subject.

"What do you think of the young man at the Priory?" she said.

Anstruther recalled his thoughts, and turned towards her.

"Well, I like him," he answered. "He's honest and simple—plenty of character too. Knows his business well, I believe, and is a fine seaman. Mind, I don't say he'll ever set the Thames on fire."

Miss Burchell replied that she had only known one genius in her life, and he was a poor fool who was cheated by his house-keeper and eventually took to drink. Then, à propos of the Thames, she added that that river had just seen fit to invade her basement, as well as Peter Moor's house, where it was, so to speak, chronic: and she, Sarah Burchell, would be much obliged if he, Richard Anstruther, would suggest a means of getting it out again as, unlike Moor, she was not minded to sit quiescent until it was up to her neck.

They were discussing the point when the guests began to arrive.

In the eighteen-thirties, parties were certainly not generally attended in the languid and critical spirit they are now. This evening Mrs. Heywood's innocent delight in them was as palpable as ever; John Heywood had got into his best stock and coat with but mild growling at his wife's stupidity in having accepted the invitation; even Mrs. King dimly felt there was something wicked in refusing one for no better reason than that you did not wish to accept it; while David was aware that his mother would have diagnosed in him some

disease of body or mind if he had expressed a preference for utilising the long warm May evening in the garden. The eldest Miss Clutterbuck, a young lady with a simper, very black hair and very round red cheeks like a cheap doll, was his partner at dinner: they came to an end of all their common topics of interest with the soup: and it then remained to David to look across the table at Theodora Heywood, whose portion was old Mr. Clutterbuck, and to envy him. Once, she caught David's eye, and responded with a smile: returning to Mr. Clutterbuck with a manner certainly a little gracious, as of one who considered the opinions of an old tallow-chandler, originating in Greenhithe, to be decidedly negligible.

Anstruther's dinners and wines were admirable, and he was himself an accomplished host—easy, amusing, well posted in current events and full of good stories: his manner giving hardly any indication of his melancholy history—a history, which was indeed, as he knew very well and cared very little, variously interpreted in the village. The dining-table was round, so that no attention was called to the painful absence of the mistress of the house; Miss Burchell, in her invariable old brown silk dress and her best brown front (used, as ever, to adorn, not to conceal) was nearly always one of the guests—quite willing to observe in silence, and entirely able to hold her own in any conversation. She was near enough to David King to talk with him a little; asked him about his life at sea; and presently, sitting by Camilla in the drawing-room, said briskly,

"I like your son, ma'am. You're very fortunate": on which Mrs. King of course instantly and for ever liked Miss Burchell, whose brusque manner and stiff gentlemanly figure she had hitherto found rather alarming.

When the men came in, the piano, a fine early Broadwood, was opened; Anstruther lit the piano candles and, to her own accompaniment and in that sweet voice which had

something young and fresh in it for ever, Mrs. Heywood sang that gay little song of Leigh Hunt's:

"If you become a nun, dear,
A friar I will be;
In any cell you run, dear,
Pray look behind for me!"

and then the gravely beautiful "Encompassed in an angel's frame"—to which a little Leigh Hunt so often listened from the lips of his mother.

David, who found himself next Theodora near a window which opened on the garden, said, "How beautifully Mrs. Heywood sings!" and when Theo replied, "Dear mother has a very pretty little voice," perceived that the prophetess was without honour in her own country.

Presently, under cover of picking up her little ivory fan which she had dropped, King looked up at his companion and said quickly, *sotto voce*, "Shall we go into the garden?" The long window by their side stood ajar: Theo assenting, David took her crimson shawl, which lay by her, and in a minute they were out of doors quite unnoticed, with the window quietly drawn to behind them.

King put the shawl about her shoulders, saying, "It's so stuffy in there! You won't catch cold or anything of that sort?"

Theodora replied, with a flash of her beautiful eyes, "Of course I shan't"; then added, "Dinner parties are so long!" which they certainly were. King supplemented, "And can be such a bore!" and they laughed and were friends.

It was a balmy and starlit night; a faint breeze stirring among the mays and lilacs blew warm perfume in their faces, and there was still light enough to see each other's. Theodora was in white—the crimson shawl above it looked like the mantle of an Empress; and, with her long neck and her dark patrician head, King found her as striking a contrast physically to Miss Clutterbuck—who was dumpy, with a *nez retroussé*—as he already knew she was mentally.

Her political knowledge being still a new acquisition she was not unnaturally anxious to show she had it: and, turning the conversation to it, talked, and talked well.

If she was inclined to be what the vulgar call cocksure, she was not at all the egoist who must always be heard and can never listen: when she "bent that brow of hers" to attend to King's brief rejoinders, she was as beautiful as a Muse: she was eighteen to his three and twenty: and there was May in the air and the blood.

Only Camilla noticed their return to the drawing-room. Miss Clutterbuck was playing on the harp to Sarah Burchell's accompaniment. When the music had died away, Anstruther came up to King and Miss Heywood. He wore of an evening, as did many of his cloth in those days, the knee breeches and silk stockings which are still its court dress.

"Well," he said, looking at King with his sharp eyes. "This is an uncommon easy berth! You won't like the sea after this. When will you be going back?"

King, who was no courtier, laughed and said, "Soon, I hope."

Anstruther turned to Theo with, "There's one for us!"

David replied, "A holiday's a holiday." Then, rashly supplemented, "It's because you know it won't last that you enjoy it."

"Oh! that's so, is it?" says Anstruther. "We're all very well *pour passer le temps*. What do you think of that, Miss Theo?"

Theo had found by experience how rarely one has the luck to invent a crushing answer in time, and had also found by experience that it was dangerous to spar with Anstruther, as he liked the game and very often won it. So she merely smiled slightly and said nothing.

When he turned away, King, who, like many people who thoroughly know their own jobs, are content to believe that other people know theirs, suggested that Anstruther was an excellent parson.

A slight flush came on Theo's face, and she answered rather quickly, "Well, I think he looks after the material needs of the parish well enough, if you mean that: and we all consider he quite over-pays his grooms and gardeners! But I think he fails a good deal on the spiritual side of things."

King replied with a kind of cheerful simplicity, which had deceived others before Miss Heywood into vaguely feeling that they were his superior, "Oh! does he? I thought everything was quite A-1. He looks such a capable old fellow"—every one over thirty was to David what David's grandsons would call an old bird—"and the church is always full. Isn't that a sure sign?"

Theodora replied—in a voice of reservations—that it was certainly a good sign.

Then King dropped her fan, with which he had been playing: as they both stooped to pick it up, their hands met: they looked at each other, rose, and mixed with the rest of the party.

It was the simple custom of the Ingleshthorpians to return from their entertainments on foot—only the Clutterbucks being fetched in their green chariot, still feeling obliged to prove they had one.

As David and his mother walked down the hill, she was unusually silent, and it was not till they neared the Priory—standing like a stout old grey ghost (almost like the comfortable ghost of good Uncle Charles himself) in a wide flood of moonlight—that she said, in a wistful voice that tried not to be anxious, "Miss Heywood is a *very* handsome girl, isn't she, Davie?"

David came out of a reverie to reply, "Yes, she is, and a very clever one too."

Mrs. King found the adjective quite comforting, for she knew that, though the ordinary man often admires the temerity of the extraordinary one who marries a clever woman, he rarely imitates it.

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That spring, as it ripened and mellowed to summer, was a perfect and exquisite thing, calling even a generation which so strangely mistrusted sunshine and open air, out of doors to enjoy both, and positively urging upon them water-parties and picnics.

So it came about, as it were naturally, that at Anstruther's smart luncheon at Scotney, King found himself listening to Theo's history of the Castle: and at the Clutterbucks' water-party rowing her slowly down the Thames, Theo steering—very jerkily, but with an admirable self-confidence—and looking so very handsome in her summer frock and straw bonnet that, after all, her steering—good, bad, or indifferent—was of no moment.

Then the Archibald Forrests—their mourning prevented their attending the larger gatherings where, it must be confessed, their absence left no aching void—bade King to a quiet dinner: Miss Heywood making it a *partie carré*, with a crimson rose tucked carelessly into the blue blackness of her hair. Night air being fortunately inimical to the Forrests, their guests strolled in the garden alone: the rose fell from its dark nest on to the path: David, retrieving it, held it out to its owner, saying with great simplicity, "Will you wear it again?" and then presently, after it had lain in his large and competent hand awhile, put it in his pocket.

Forrest, watching them from the window, said fretfully, "It's a pity that good-looking girl should throw herself away on my cousin. She might marry anyone!"

And poor Mrs. Forrest, who perhaps felt the sharp contrast of her own pale meagreness with Theo's strong and splendid youth, remarked that there was not, in point of fact, anyone else in Inglethorpe for her to marry—Dr. Moor being suspected of other intentions.

King walked home with Theo that night—the maid, with the shoes, of course following at a little distance.

When he reached the Priory his mother said to him, "Who was there, Davie, besides you?"

And he said, "Only Theo," using her Christian name, unconsciously, for the first time.

Camilla, neatly folding away his best evening suit the next day, did not know whether to be sorry or glad that she found in his pocket, but as if forgotten, the fading petals of a rose.

After this, she declined several of the festivities for herself, not being at all of the stern stuff of which self-torturers are made; but she knew of course that, on the following morning, David met Theodora quite by accident at the village shop, in an atmosphere thickly flavoured by boots and cheese: and that the morning after that, a real need of string, and the offchance of another meeting, took him there again.

Then, of course, there was the churchyard where everybody met everybody on Sundays after service. From the Priory pew, King, by slightly shifting his seat, had an excellent view of Miss Heywood with her beautiful expression of strict piety—unruffled even when her parents' ample proportions knocked down their stout prayer-books and it became her duty to dive for, and recover them, in the dark recesses of the pew.

It would be hard to say what were the thoughts of his mind and the feelings of his heart at this time: looking back, he found that he hardly knew himself.

It was natural he should not be afraid of marriage, for he was the child of a very happy one: nor of responsibility, for his trade had made him early used to it, and it was in his character to like it, and to find life tame with none. His clean record had included no dealing with the wrong sort of woman, and as to the right, Theo had real moral dignity, and if she was conscious of being superior to other girls—since she was so, that was natural, or inevitable. Once, but he thought only once, it did strike him that falling in love was a less ardent and an easier process than he had supposed it to be: where were the fears and tears, the trembling and delicious joys, stolen sweets and hidden agonies, of which he

had heard? Well, his own case doubtless was a fortunate one—smooth sailing on summer seas: it was common sense to drift with the tide since it took him where he wanted to go. He often thought, with a simplicity perfectly man-like, how pleasant it would be to return from his voyages and find Theo, the stately and efficient mistress—she always seemed efficient, so she naturally would be—of the Grey Priory, with his mother happily established for ever in the Tower rooms; though any woman—ininitely less sensible than David was a sensible man—could have told him that with a young woman of Theodora's masterful character, that dream must remain one.

One evening—in the afternoon, Theo had brought Mrs. King a basket of peaches, and had strolled about the garden with David for an hour—when he joined his mother after dinner in the drawing-room, he came at once, sat by her on the sofa, and looking up in her face with a twinkle in his eye that she knew, said at once with great directness, "Don't you like Theo, mother?"

She answered quickly, "Oh yes, dear, I do. She is very high minded," and she sighed, for Miss Heywood's high mind certainly had the effect of making poor Mrs. King feel her own to be a very slight thing indeed.

There was a long pause. Then she said in a trembling voice, "Do you want to marry her, David?"

He answered instantly, "Yes. But I don't want to distress you."

He could not see her face, which she had rested against his sleeve: his idea was, not that she did not want him to marry Theo, but that she did not want him to marry at all. He believed hereafter that, if she had taken fate and her courage into her hands and said, "Don't marry her, David! Her head is so much larger than her heart, and you will never be happy!" he would have yielded, and that work, time, and a healing sweep of salt sea air would have cured his hurt.

But Camilla had never strengthened her judgment by using

it: once only in all her life had she boldly acted on it: after that, she had depended wholly on Henry's. If he were only here! But David was very like Henry. Beneath the boy's blue eyes and equable temper were the father's grit, obstinacy, resolution—call it what you will—the stuff that makes a man. David would judge right for himself! All her instincts told her that such as he must gang their ain gait, and buy their experience for themselves—though they pay, to the uttermost farthing.

So she only rubbed her cheek against his shoulder and said, "If you're sure, Davie—you mustn't mind me. After all—" and she laughed a little, guiltily, "I didn't marry to please my father—and I was very happy."

And King, putting his vigorous young arm about her, gave her a squeeze of whose strength he was not in the least aware, and said, "And so shall I be: and presently you will be very glad yourself."

And then Bridget came in with the tea and the candles.

All the same, that evening Mrs. King sat up and wrote six pages—crossed, and numbered wrong, and with every other word deeply underlined—to James Gilmour, who responded in a dozen words, suggesting himself as a visitor.

He arrived on the fifth day, very cheery and dapper as usual, with a smart new carpet bag, which David carried for him from Dartford.

On the second evening of his visit Theodora dined at the Priory—Theodora, not only at her handsomest, but at her most gracious. It would indeed have been impossible for the severest virtue to take exception to Mr. Gilmour, he was so eminently kindly, good natured and respectable: and Theo was in no snubbing mood.

After dinner, when the young people had strolled down to the river, Gilmour joined Camilla in the drawing-room—a dim little figure in her black dress in the soft half lights.

"My dear Mrs. King," he said, drawing his chair close to hers, "why! it would be an excellent thing. The young lady

is charming. A nice little dowry, you say, too—and a clever head on her shoulders. The boy would be lucky. I confess it does not seem to me that he is, so far as one can see, very *épris*—if we may borrow a word from our French friends: still, that will come, that will come, certainly,” and he crossed one neat little leg over the other, and looked down at the pair as if he admired them.

The objections which had been in Camilla’s mind seemed suddenly so feeble and insignificant that she fell back on the one James Gilmour had suggested himself.

“If he is not so very fond of her—dear Mr. Gilmour—” she said.

Dear Mr. Gilmour took her little hand in his chubby one, cleared his throat, and replied, “We must be a little worldly wise, ma’am—we must indeed. I feel I stand *in loco parentis* to Davie—though you wouldn’t hear of me officially in that capacity—and we know the temptations a young man is exposed to, and what a safeguard a charming young wife would be to him. David’s a good boy, but, confound it all, ma’am, he’s human.” Then, thinking he had spoken roughly, he added, “And the parents are substantial, worthy people, you say—and would approve of the marriage—all quite as it should be: and I can fancy you very happy here with your grand-children.”

Camilla shook her head, but slightly and with a faint smile. The ally whose help she had asked had gone over to the enemy, and she accepted defeat.

Three weeks later, Sarah Burchell alighted from a chaise at Ferry Cottage on her return from London, where she had been since the day following Anstruther’s dinner party, nursing a sick brother. Anstruther himself coming out of Moor’s garden gate at the moment, she signed to him. As they shook hands, Anstruther asked her how she had left her invalid, and if she had heard lately from Nancy.

She replied reflectively, “Nancy’s been gone eight months

to-day. She'll be falling in love with one of the French cousins over there if I don't take care, and that wouldn't suit my book."

Then she added briskly, "How's Inglethorpe? And how's the young man at the Priory? I liked him, though he mayn't be startlingly clever, as you said—he's one in a hundred all the same."

Anstruther turned and looked at her, with his face full of the malicious irony that veiled very kind and even tender feeling.

"You're too late, Sarah," he said, "if you want him for Nancy. I met old Heywood this afternoon—very cock-a-hoop and pleased about it—David King's engaged to Theodora."

CHAPTER VIII

A BOB IN PICKLE

IF the mental and sentimental process which resulted in David King's betrothal to Miss Heywood was never perfectly plain to him, Theodora's steps had been as deliberately planned as the mountain climber's who cuts them with his axe in the ice.

Not that she was in the least a matrimonial schemer. But her sense told her that, situated as young women were in the thirties, matrimony meant freedom and was a necessary preliminary to almost every independent undertaking. True, Jane Austen had made name and fame without it: but, underneath her vanity, Theo was too sensible not to suspect that it would not be merely the tastelessness and bigotry of publishers which would prevent her becoming a Jane herself: besides, as one literary lady vigorously expressed it, all the others she had ever seen (except Jane Porter and Miss Barrett) would have served as scarecrows to keep the birds off the cherries, so that Theo was manifestly unsuited by nature for the rôle. Florence Nightingale, indeed, created a profession. But Florence Nightingale had not yet been heard of: and Theodora Heywood certainly lacked her rare originality. Besides, she was hampered with a father who would never have allowed her soul to expand in any unconventional direction.

Since the days of Miss Winter she had quite made up her mind that the trifling duties in her home were beneath her powers: that, as she saw it admirably run by a mother so much her intellectual inferior, it must be contemptibly easy

to run it admirably: and though she went on assisting in the mendings and bottlings (partly from her high sense of duty, and partly because her dear old mother, who was not without strength of character, insisted) it was with a soul and manner more *de haut en bas* than ever.

Only that July Mrs. Heywood had come into her John's library in the midst of a busy morning, in her stout white cooking apron, and having carefully closed the door, put her arm about his shoulder and said, in an ominous whisper: "John! Theo's marked all the strawberry jam, raspberry: and the raspberry, strawberry. I don't see any good in being so clever if you can't even write the labels right—do you?"

Whereat Theo's father had growled deeply in his stock, "Make her do 'em again!" and spent an anxious hour, once more darkly suspicious that Theodora was going to take after the Aunt on the Stairs, or the Serpent whom they had warmed in their bosom in the form of a resident governess.

The history and modern politics which Theo still went on studying by energetic fits and starts (and which her talent for putting all her goods in the shop window enabled her to talk of for the rest of her life with an air of erudition whenever the subjects came on the *tapis*) led not the less, as she soon saw, merely to a *cul-de-sac*; and her meeting and conversation with Moor outside the Masters' dilapidated cottage had taken her, as it were, on a rebound, and appealed at once to her inherited philanthropic instincts and to her determination to make use of her powers and her intelligence.

That the poor had a right to be considered in the laws of their country, that the rich owed them not a dole but a duty, and that the labourers' riots of 1830, of which of course she had heard, were anything but a proof that they needed further instructions in religion, patience and submission, were ideas which could not have occurred to her, since in that day they had occurred to nobody.

The rich then nearly always approached the poor in the rôle of patron and preacher (a rôle undoubtedly congenial to

Miss Heywood's temperament): while most people quite agreed with Hannah More in "allowing" no writing for the lower classes, and considering reading dangerous as liable to make them discontented with their wages (sometimes of a shilling a day) and to "imbue them with a spirit of combination to dictate to their employers": while they were informed—often in so many words—that though they were "to try and secure a place in a better world," it would be highly presumptuous to try and get one in this—where all the front seats had been reserved by Providence for the upper classes.

Theo was so much in advance of her generation that, perceiving wrong, she assumed it could always be put right and that she was the person so to put it. Ingleshorpe certainly had not its full complement of charities! Mr. Anstruther lacked spiritual enterprise! But before and above all, her restless energies fretted her soul: she was cabined, cribbed, confined by the restrictions put on her sex and her class: and she saw—like other philanthropists before her and after her—through philanthropy the way to power and prestige.

As *châtelaine* of the Grey Priory, to play the part of Lady Bountiful and Paramount to the neighbourhood, to awake and reform the parish, and, from the vantage ground of a prosperous marriage, to lead—and lead in the way they should go—the upper classes as well, was indeed an alluring prospect.

To be sure, King himself did not come much into it. But Theo could assure herself—and it was certainly to the credit of her virtue, though not of her heart—that if he had not been fit for that virtue to mate with, she would at once have renounced him and all the pleasant dreams and schemes to which marriage with him was a necessary starting-point. Yet she really liked him: as she grew to know him better, she liked him more: his firm, honest, good-tempered, sailor-like face, his keen and kindly eyes, his easy readiness to do what she wished—"soopie in things immaterial" and his steady admiration of her beauty and her powers. His silence respect-

ing his own did not exactly mislead her into thinking he had none. But his simplicity and absence of pretence made her feel herself the wiser, and the worldly wiser: and the fact that David, by the time he was fourteen, had seen more of life and men than she was likely to see in the whole of her existence, did not trouble her at all.

On one uncertain morning, with a damp coolness in the air presaging autumn, about three weeks after their engagement, King walked up early to Beech House, accompanied by Charles Forrest's sensible mongrel, Philip. Leaving him outside, David went straight upstairs to Theo's sitting-room.

In those days, people like the Heywoods not only respected Mrs. Grundy but almost loved her: in the case of engaged couples, however, the rules the old dame had laid down were so ferociously strict that they incited the independent and liberty-loving Briton first to evade and finally, as in our day, to make mincemeat of them. Therefore, though it was not correct that David should sit half the morning with an unchaperoned Theo, John Heywood pretended not to hear his step on the stairs, and Mrs. Heywood went on busily with her household duties below them.

The old schoolroom looked out on the front lawn and the beeches and was a most pleasant, sunny place; a little shabby as, to be perfectly comfortable, a room should be, and strewn with books and fragments of various occupations. For Theodora's untidiness was certainly not that of a slovenly mind: she had had in fact so many irons in the fire that some had naturally been jostled out of it, and were, so to speak, standing about cooling. Under the beautiful little piano (her father's present) was a heap of music, dating from the period when she had felt herself a musician: there was the (then) inevitable Album, to which Nancy Legard had contributed a feeble Charade and Theo herself an Ode to the Deep, which she had once surveyed from a bathing machine at Brighton. Tucked away on a shelf was an embroidery

frame containing a half-finished peacock in brilliant-hued silks—half-finished, not merely because Theodora had lit on something more interesting to do, but because it was obviously absurd that a Miss Heywood should continue to do at all what a Miss Clutterbuck had shown herself able to do better. The bookshelf with the histories, an Italian Primer, Keith's "Use of the Globes," Pinnock's Catechism and other forgotten educational manuals, had two or three of Scott's novels superadded—the only novels permitted to the young person, all fiction being looked on by her elders, as by Queen Victoria, as "a dangerous distraction from the serious interests of life."

When King came in she was sitting at a much-littered davenport writing busily: just raising her eyes from the work he had interrupted, and with her pen still in her hand, she offered him a cool and lovely cheek, saying, "You *are* early, David, this morning!"

King took and kept her disengaged left hand—with the new ring twinkling on it—and sitting down in a low chair near her, looked up with some unusual excitement in his eyes, and said, "Apologies, ma'am!"

Then, with a certain shamefaced modesty, which always took him when he spoke of his own affairs, he looked at the footstool at his feet and said, "I've been offered the command of 'The Pearl,' a fine new vessel, just off the stocks on the Thames. I went down to see her yesterday: and she's to sail for Bombay as soon as I can get her cargo together."

If he had been introspective he might, during those three weeks of their engagement, have been left with the impression that when he spoke of his business in great waters, Theo accorded him the polite attention one gives to the hobbies of an old gentleman, consoling his senility with fossils or butterflies, rather than the vigorous interest taken in things that matter. But he was no more mistrustful than he was conceited. Still, he was conscious now of just a faint chill when putting down her pen, she turned her face to him, and said,

"Oh, you have accepted the command then: and you are pleased?"

David, who still had her left hand in his, replied, "Of course I am! It is an excellent thing."

He told her something about the ship, the crew and passengers she would carry, and even drew a rough sketch of her on a half sheet of paper, and pointed out her overhanging cut-water and figurehead, the full poop on which officers and passengers would live, the galley for cooking purposes on the deck amidships, and the heavy masts and yards. But, though Theo was entirely attentive and threw in no silly ejaculations or futile questions, he was still conscious of some coldness, as of a faint mist, in the atmosphere. Then, thinking he had penetrated it—he remembered his impression long after and knew himself a fool—he said,

"We shan't take more than three or four months to get there, via the Cape: and then we should be six or eight weeks in port, discharging and re-loading cargo: and another three or four months getting home again—that isn't an eternity!" and he looked up at her with some puzzle still in his eyes, and held her hand warm and close.

With the other, Theo had taken up her pen and was making little dots on the blotting-paper in front of her.

"Of course this might be your last voyage—if you liked?" she said.

He answered at once, with a sudden tightening of the mouth, "But, of course, I shouldn't like!"

Then, with a density peculiarly masculine, pursuing the remarkable idea that Theo was going to miss him, he added in a voice of great softness and kindness, "I shall get a long time on shore, Theo, when I do come back—and we can be married at once."

Something perhaps in his very simplicity softened Theo—as even a harsh person—and she was not harsh—will soften to the innocence of a child. The smile she turned on him was quite a lovely thing: and then there was a brisk step

on the stair—intentionally loud—and Miss Burchell came in.

"I know I'm *de trop*," she said, nodding to them both, "and I'm not staying more than a couple of minutes, but I thought you'd like to hear something." She had a letter in her hand.

Miss Burchell's garments—invariably designed for use and freedom of action—had always, like Richard Anstruther's, a neatness and a well-groomed air about them and, like her face, plenty of individuality and character. She stood now, with her back to the empty hearth—quite as if it were a gentlemanly back being warmed at a fire—and observed King and Theodora, without seeming to observe them—which is, after all, the only observation that is of any use: the watched, who know it, are no longer worth watching.

"My letter is from Nancy, Theo," she said. "She'll be back on the 30th."

And that stupid David, still pursuing his obsession that Theo would miss him, says, "That's the day I go. I'm glad she's coming back." (He had, of course, heard all about her, and her and Theo's friendship.) "It will be nice for Theo."

Sarah Burchell, who knew that Theodora was entirely convinced that all the benefits of her friendship with Nancy were Nancy's, appreciated Theo's real magnanimity in saying, "Yes, indeed it will, she has been away such a long time." Then she turned to David: "But it was not the 30th—you said you need not go till the 3rd."

He answered, "No, I need not. But I'm going to see my aunt—my father's sister at Plymouth—for a few days first, so I shall leave here on the 30th."

"What a bore for you!" exclaimed Sarah Burchell, with her eyes as sharp as a gimlet. "I'm an aunt myself. I recall the tragic expressions on the ingenuous countenances of my nephews when they're sent to visit me."

Theodora, who, disapproving of Miss Burchell root and branch, lost as few chances as possible of snubbing her with politeness and propriety, said in a virtuous voice, "David feels it is his duty to go, I expect."

And King, who was certainly in a tactless mood that morning, replied cheerfully, "Oh, no! I don't go out of duty. I really want to see her. She was very good to me when I was small—a most aggravating little beast I must have been, from all accounts—and she writes me good long yarns about all sorts of things every now and then, and gives me such jolly handsome presents, I'm ashamed to take them. She's so hard up—like we used to be," explains David: and he produced—very much as he had produced Gilmour's clasp-knife in his grandfather's dining-room at Edmonton—a very fat round silver watch, with a long inscription on it, from his affectionate aunt and godmother, Mary-Ann King.

After Theo, Miss Burchell studied this trophy, and returned it to the owner. Then, apparently looking indifferently out of the window at the tops of the great beeches, she said, "Well, a day or two more or less doesn't make much difference one way or the other": and the young people's silence apparently giving consent, her eyes began to twinkle.

Not the less, she presently went downstairs again in a thoughtful mood.

When Philip, who had been waiting for his master on the lawn, impatiently patient with his head on his fore-paws, gave a short, sharp bark to signalise the fact that he was weary of the hanging-about business and proposed to continue his walk, David started up with, "I say! it's late! I'm spoiling your morning": and Theo, not denying the imputation, said she would walk down the drive with him.

There was a delicate pink scarf on the piano—one of the long, trailing scarves which she wore so effectively and carelessly; falling about her soft grey frock, it made her look like young morning coming out of the clouds. That romantic comparison did not occur to David: but her compelling beauty touched and quickened his senses. He put his arm through her slender one; and, at the lodge gate, it was not the possible eye of Mrs. Grylls, the lodge-keeper, but some-

thing cool and stately about Theo herself, that restricted his farewell to a very long grasp of her hand.

She looked at the lodge for a minute, and the great, hideous iron gates, and said, "I have often thought"—she really meant the idea had that moment occurred to her—"how sharply these park gates cut one off from one's poorer neighbours": and King said, with perfect directness, "I thought that was what they were meant to do."

All the same, walking down the hill, it passed across his mind that Theo perhaps would not really much appreciate living among her poorer neighbours and being, in a sense, of them, as were Moor and Miss Burchell.

Besides the business connected with his new command, King had various matters to settle connected with the Grey Priory: and, that evening, sat up later than usual, writing—a task he did not love. Archibald Forrest—himself an excellent man of business—had put David up to his; grudgingly, but efficiently all the same; and coming at last almost to like King's teachable silence, his straightforward mind and the too rare humility which prevented him from supposing he could learn at once, with ease, what other people had learnt with time and difficulty.

It was nearly half-past eleven this evening when his mother came in to say Good night; and, having snuffed the candles on his writing-table, asked in a low voice, "Did Theo mind your going to Plymouth?"

David replied, "Oh, no, I don't think so. She knew I ought to."

And his mother sighed so profoundly that she actually ruffled the hair on his head.

He turned to her, looking up. "You didn't want her to mind, did you?" he said, with a smile.

Since the engagement had become an accomplished and irrevocable fact, Mrs. King had wasted a great deal of time in painfully conscientious efforts to appreciate Theodora: whereas, of course, the first step a sensible person takes to

make himself like what he dislikes is to put it wholly out of his mind: so, with a still deeper sigh, she said, "Theo's so good and sensible! I can't help *grudging* Mary-Ann those three days!"

When his mother left him, King sat for a few minutes in unusual reverie. Theo, of course, *was* so refreshingly sensible and well-read that she did not need to be assured that when stormy winds did blow on land a thousand miles away, as likely as not David's ship would be rolling easily on a glassy sea, with her sails just flapping, or creeping up a quiet river between protecting shores: and that brief explanation had sufficed to make her understand perfectly the nature of the vessel—whereas Camilla was still offering surmises which would have been surprising in a native of Central Africa, and which, in the daughter of an island race—the wife of one sailor and the mother of another—were perfectly staggering.

Yet, all the same, David was aware that his mother entered into his heart and feelings: knew that to him his ship was not a thing, but a living and breathing human creature: like a human creature, not necessarily the less lovable for faults and flaws: and, despite them all, to him a Pearl of great price.

Presently he removed his boots, lest their creak should rouse a parent who was broad awake thinking of him, and, having blown out the candles, ascended the oak stairs, which creaked as loudly as stairs only creak by night and when their silence is essential.

Suddenly, just before he fell asleep, there came back to his mind Theo's "This might be your last voyage if you liked!" And his mouth took that perfectly rigid expression, whose significance, leaving, as it nearly always did, his blue eyes serene and good-tempered, Theo had yet to learn.

The summer had collapsed in rain and wind. But it was a very fair autumn morning—though but the end of August, the gardens were yellowing and autumnal—when King was

due to start on his voyage—via Plymouth. It had been arranged that Theo was to drive him in the Beech House chaise to Dartford, there to meet the afternoon coach to London—Miss Burchell accompanying them to play propriety and also to meet Nancy, who was to arrive home that day. Old Heywood, in town on business, was escorting her from London.

It was about two o'clock in the afternoon when Theo drove into the gates of the Grey Priory. On the doorstep awaiting her was David with his mother, Susan and Miss Burchell, as well as Anstruther, who, long since confirmed in his liking for King, had walked up at the last minute to say Good-bye.

Mrs. King had been crying. But, though one of the very earliest and most constant of David's recollections was of his mother in tears on the sofa, and of his father measuring the sal volatile in a medicine glass and saying "Come, come, Camilla!" quite sternly, the tears always distressed him. He was glad now, for her, of Susan's fat supporting person in the background, and also reflected that Theo's calmness would help to prove to her the absurdity of fears of sharks, whales, shipwrecks, cannibals, typhoons and yellow fevers, which beset her heart as if it were the plot of a Tale of Adventure for Young Gentlemen.

Sarah Burchell mounted the dickey at the back: Barnes put in his master's bags: there were the final good-byes: and then King jumped in and seated himself by Theo, who flicked the cob with the whip—and they were off. David looked back to wave to his mother: and Miss Burchell, who had caught sight of his face, tapped him presently on the shoulder to say, "I shall go and sit with her for a few hours this evening, and we can talk about you the whole time!"

David said "That'll be a very good plan" so simply that, as Miss Burchell afterwards told Anstruther, she could have kissed him.

When the chaise clattered into the busy little Dartford High Street, and pulled up at the "Bull and George," the in-

coming London coach, expected half an hour earlier, had not arrived. The outgoing one—the “Arrow”—being due to start in a very few minutes, King, who had taken his seat a day or two earlier, climbed up to it after hurried good-byes and while his luggage was still being stowed into the boot.

Theo's farewell was perfectly composed: and David, as he held her slender hand very tightly, was grateful for the composure, which had so often meant in himself, and meant now, strong feeling steadily repressed.

Miss Burchell gave him one sound clap on the back as *her* farewell. “Take care of yourself, young man,” she said, “the good are scarce!”

There was quite a little crowd on the path awaiting the departure, when, with a fine cracking of whips, at a good break-neck pace to make up for lost time, and with the four horses in a lather, the incoming coach clattered in and drew up on the opposite side of the way to the “Arrow.”

King's quick eyes caught sight, on the top of it, of a little figure in the shelter of old Heywood's portliness—a little figure with a bonnet which, even to David's perfectly untutored eye, seemed to lack the British solidity which is so valuable an adjunct to character and so heavy a handicap to millinery. The charming face beneath it suddenly lit up as its eyes caught sight of Miss Burchell on the pavement.

This, then, was Nancy.

In five minutes the “Arrow” was well away—a flying black speck on the white ribbon of the London road.

CHAPTER IX

NANCY

WHEN little Nancy Legard fell like a bolt from the blue, or a gift from Heaven, into Miss Sarah Burchell's empty arms, most persons had been of the opinion that that brusque, brisk, and plain-spoken young spinster was not at all a suitable custodian of infancy and promised to be wholly lacking in the maternal mercies and softness.

"General opinions," however, "are generally wrong." Under her knock-me-down manner, Miss Burchell concealed not only a large heart but a very warm one, which, moreover, was at that particular moment both sore and sad: the little creature twined herself about it in the wonderful fashion only young things have, and Ferry Cottage was an unusually happy home.

Nancy grew into a most sympathetic and a very dear little girl: soft-hearted quite to a fault; impulsive, quick-tempered, intelligent, but not clever, either in the sense in which her aunt was vigorous-minded and original, or as little Theo Heywood was clever, in an aptitude for book-learning.

Nancy, indeed, always greatly preferred to it Rosalie, her doll, or the little furry squirrels in Cousin Richard's wood: even the pink piglets which she tip-toed to look at—his hand in hers—over the brim of Mr. Heywood's sty, or the horses in the stables at the Grey Priory, whose noses Charles Forrest lifted her up to kiss.

Until she shared Miss Potter's incapacities with Theo—and after Miss Potter's removal—Sarah Burchell taught her niece herself. Perhaps all their lives the two loved each

other and agreed so well because they were so totally different, and because Sarah Burchell realised and accepted that difference from the first. No women were then well educated in the sense in which most are now—the world being thus spared that supreme bore, the mediocre mind cultivated beyond its powers. Sarah Burchell, wholly self-taught, had acquired knowledge because she loved it: and she certainly did wish that the books which formed so strong and faithful a consolation in her own life, might have helped Nancy through hers. But, after all, books are but books: mighty “poor substitutes for life” and for “the spark of nature’s fire” which they often damp down and never ignite.

Of a winter evening, as Nancy of ten or twelve sat stitching—with the latest kitten in her lap, for it was at the tiniest stage this maternal heart loved all creatures best—Sarah Burchell would read aloud to her, and be surprised that she nearly always knew by her unspoilt instinct what was false and bad, and loved what was true and good. She quite ceased soothing the kitten as Sarah Burchell read her Cowper’s “Lines to his Mother’s Picture”: her grey eyes were full of tears long before the end: but when, a year or two later, her aunt proposed reading it again, saying, “You liked that, Nancy,” Nancy said quickly, “Yes! but I can’t bear to hear it, Sal: think how miserable the poor little fellow must have felt! Don’t read it again, there’s a dear old thing!”

Nancy called her aunt “Sal” and a “dear” (or a “stupid”) “old thing” in a manner highly disapproved by Inglethorpe—and, indeed, by most people in a day mighty particular about forms and wonderfully lax about facts.

Before lessons began in the morning, Nancy helped her aunt to clean and brush their little house, which was a source of the greatest pride and interest to them both, which knew little of the indifferent hired hand, and was at least as well kept as any great house in the neighbourhood. For the ponderous furniture and heavy draperies which wealth acquired with, apparently, the philanthropic design of em-

playing superfluous labour to clean them, Ferry Cottage knew not. Its few adornments were simple and good, if they were old: the parlour, with its bow window overhanging the river, its faded red curtains, its well-worn carpet, its solid chairs and its generous fires, was, said Anstruther, the most comfortable room in the village.

When he dined with them, Nancy abandoned lessons for the day with the greatest enthusiasm, and helped Miss Burchell to prepare the dishes he liked, to polish the silver till it shone like a butler's, and to get out the treasured remains of the beautiful old white and gold dessert service which had been Sarah Burchell's grandmother's, and on which Archibald Forrest had cast sheep's eyes in vain.

Nancy was quite as pleased as her aunt when Anstruther began his dinner, as he nearly always did, by grumbling, "Why can't *my* old fool turn out a soup like this?"

For dessert there was a bottle of a special claret, sealed green, which had been a part of old Burchell's cellar—for the parson was poor indeed who had no cellar then—and was kept for Anstruther's particular benefit.

While Nancy, with a practical pinafore over the old muslin which formed her evening frock, cleared the little round dining-table which stood in the deep bay of the window, Sarah Burchell and Anstruther would draw their chairs to the fire and, as Anstruther finished his wine, talked; but rarely much. They were, and had long been, at the stage of intimacy when silence is as companionable as speech. The harsh melancholy of Anstruther's face softened, or seemed to soften, in that ruddy glow of candle and fire light: Sarah Burchell's capable and roughened hands lay idle on the work in her lap, and her eyes considered the fire. The sounds of Nancy's washing-up in the pantry faintly reached them: sometimes Nancy's soft humming to herself over the task. Then she pushed up the door-latch and came in with the coffee on the old Chippendale tray.

Once, as she put it on the table, looking from one face

to the other with her bright young eyes, she said, "Sal and Cousin Richard! I believe you were both asleep!"

Anstruther said, "Give us some music then, and disturb our dreams."

And, as usual, Nancy had unclothed the harp standing in the corner and sung to it with that sweet young singing voice which, carefully trained by Sarah Burchell, herself no mean musician, Anstruther pardonably thought one of the most delightful things he had ever heard.

A stranger, looking in on the three, would have taken them for father, mother and child.

Sometimes Peter Moor would join them for half an hour and listen too, with his great head bent and his staring eyes fixed on the floor. It did not seem so very long ago that, when, as a hobbledehoy of a boy, he had lent a hand in Miss Burchell's garden, he had been followed about it by a small pair of pattering feet and a little girl with a basket ready for Peter's weeds. But Moor was, or should have been, busy of an afternoon, and Sarah Burchell but seldom asked him to complete their circle.

Inglethorpe, as has been said, was sociable. Miss Burchell and Nancy were often asked out, and might have been asked out a hundred times more than they were. But with them the business of home was one of the chief pleasures of life: Miss Burchell sternly discouraged that inveterate nuisance of the country village who, for want of a better word, may be called the popper-in, and had laid well to heart the counsel of the wise man, "Let thy foot be seldom in thy neighbour's house, lest he be weary of thee and hate thee." She had brought up Nancy, not only to have her "own world and live in it," but to have her own work in that world, and not to be perpetually running about helping, or hindering, other people in doing theirs. Few things being so much resented as independence, Miss Burchell was hardly popular: but, in spite of it, Nancy was, from young Master Clutterbuck—who had fallen violently in love with her when he was six, in

a very small pair of nankeen trousers and a frilled shirt collar, and they had pirouetted together round the old French dancing-master with his fiddle—to Mr. and Mrs. Heywood, who were not nearly so much in awe of her as of their own ewe lamb—and, of course, Anstruther.

He was always trying to equalise the inequalities of fortune by giving his god-daughter handsome presents: as, once upon a time, he had tried, in her own phrase, to pauperise his cousin Sarah. Once, when he had besought her to accept a loan—that thin end of the wedge of humiliation—she had turned upon him with, “Richard! you wouldn’t like me if I took it, and I shouldn’t like myself. You’re fond of money—he was, with a keen talent for judicious speculation)—and it’s a deal better you should keep it.”

Anstruther looked at her with, “You’re a proud woman, Sally.”

Sally said, “That was a birthright, Richard. Nobody gave me *that* as a dole.” Then, as if she repented her of her harshness, she added in a different voice, “I won’t deny, though, that it’s a wonderful relief to me to know if things go to the devil”—Miss Burchell was a woman of forcible speech—“Nancy would have you to fall back on.”

Anstruther replied, “And so would you, Sally, in spite of yourself”: and then he had turned to the papers on his writing-table, under the feint of arranging them, and Sarah Burchell had gone away.

It must be confessed that Nancy, being perfectly feminine and human, did greatly long for some of the smart frocks and pelisses Anstruther would so gladly have given her, and which Mrs. Heywood did not even dare to offer, for Nancy to be dressed in Theo’s cast-offs would have been more galling to Miss Burchell than Anstruther’s money. But, after all, Sarah was a clever woman with her needle, and Nancy’s nimble fingers had a way with them.

She had just passed her seventeenth birthday when the invitation arrived from her old cousin, Madam Legard, asking

her to spend six or eight months in Paris; and early on the day following the arrival of the letter, Sarah Burchell—fearful that the natural woman and her strong disinclination to part from Nancy should get the better of her—accepted the offer, and, putting her pride in her pocket, positively and plainly asked Anstruther for the journey money. The fact was, Miss Burchell, in her own young days, had seen something of the world in company with a young pupil, and the insularity which, when the great French war closed the Continent to the Briton, became more than ever his national trait, she considered to be a great drawback to his character and—as limiting his thoughts and his interests—to his happiness also.

As she and Nancy were returning from the rectory, they met old Heywood and told him of their plans. He patted Nancy's blooming cheek and said, "Well, well, ma'am, I hope you won't get Frenchified!"

And Sarah Burchell, because she liked the old fellow and perfectly realised his limitations, restrained her tongue from saying, "And I hope she will!"

Miss Burchell had not much opportunity of finding out, on that evening of Nancy's return to Inglethorpe and of David's departure from it, whether or no she had become Frenchified, for, as Mrs. Sherwood plaintively expressed it, "Those who have not been at sea can never conceive a hundredth part of the horrors of a voyage to a delicate female in a sailing packet": and poor Nancy's had been the not uncommon fate of finding herself, after tossing about for eight hours, still only two miles from the French coast. So Miss Burchell insisted on her going to bed, and herself spent the evening at the Grey Priory, being shown, as David had foreseen, relics of his infancy while Camilla retailed, which David had also foreseen, his earliest *bon mots* and his marked superiority to all other little boys whatsoever.

The next evening, which they spent alone, Miss Burchell had time to consider her niece. She had been almost a child

when she left, and now was almost a woman. With the soft roundness of her girlish figure, her curly brown hair, her warm young colour, honest grey eyes and features whose irregularity would have disqualified her for ever for a Book of Beauty, Sarah Burchell might be forgiven for thinking her a very delightful young creature. Now, too, her English naturalness had some touch of French grace—of that extreme sensitiveness to the feelings of others which make the manners of the cultivated Frenchwoman the most pleasing in the world—and she had acquired from her old cousin Madame Legard, or from her young cousin Lucile, or simply by her own imitative sense, the Gallic art of choosing, not pretty clothes as the Englishwoman does, but the clothes in which she would look pretty—often a vastly different thing.

There was no book-reading to-night. Miss Burchell had a long seam in her hand, and her serviceable feet on the fender, for the evening was cold. Nancy was sitting on a stool, also near the fire, which—the only light in the room—tinted her curls gold and copper colour and played on her face as she bent over the darn she was making in a table-napkin.

“How did you manage the house cleaning without me?” she said, looking up to thread her needle.

Sarah Burchell replied, “Pretty well for an old fool!” She did not want to talk about the house cleaning. Presently she asked, “Well, did Henri fall in love with you?” Henri was the elder brother of Lucile.

Nancy stopped working and laughed. “Oh dear, yes, Sal!” she said. “Henri falls in love with everybody. He is such a nice looking young man, with his hair *en brosse* and his moustaches so beautifully waxed—I daresay, if I had only had a *dot*, I should be Madame Henri at this moment—without even having had the bother of changing the name on my clothes. It was no *dot* saved me: poor Henri *must* marry money—he has a château in Champagne with the roof leaking and the wall-papers peeling off with the damp, all because

Cousin Marguerite hasn't been able to find him a suitable wife. It is a blessing I wasn't—suitable."

"You didn't fall in love with him, then?" asked Miss Burchell, stitching diligently.

Nancy laughed again. She had a very pretty gay laugh in those days, and much of the *espèglerie* of the little Greuze of that title. It did not seem worth while replying directly. Presently she asked, "Is Theo *very* devoted to Mr. King?"

Miss Burchell looked up. "Upon my word, I don't know," she replied; "you must find out for yourself. What did she talk to you about when you saw her this morning?"

Cutting her thread, Nancy replied, "Oh, a good deal about the changes she meant to make after she is married—I don't mean to the rooms and furniture—but she says she thinks there is a great lack of earnestness in this place and that there is a great deal to be done. I expect she means Clothing Clubs and things. She seemed to think—rather slightly of Mrs. King. Do you think—slightly of her, Sal?"

Sal said curtly that she did not. Then she asked, "Did you see David King when you arrived?"

Nancy replied, "The faintest glimpse!" After a pause and with a sigh, she added, "Theo *has* grown handsome. Oh! how I grudge her her nose!" and, jumping up, she tip-toed to survey her own far inferior organ at the little oval mirror above the mantelpiece. Then, resuming her seat and her work with a sigh (for one might as well try to reform the universe as to alter a determined feature like a nose), she asked, "By-the-bye, how is Peter Moor?"

Miss Burchell replied, rather grimly, that he was the same as ever; that the house was going to pieces and the garden was a rubbish heap; and that Peter himself very often looked like the house—dilapidated.

Nancy laid down her work and looked into the fire. "Poor old Peter!" she said, "he wants some one to look after him!"

Sarah Burchell, who had wished any conclusion but that, and who was naturally perfectly aware of Nancy's inborn

propensity for mothering half-fledged birds and shorn lambs, and expending on lame dogs much more sympathy than their condition demanded, said sharply, "Look after him! You can't look after a man like that. If he doesn't pull himself together, no one will ever do it for him. There are a lot of silly women in this world who are always sacrificing themselves to save ne'er-do-weels, and making two shipwrecks where there need only have been one. I've no patience with them!"

She spoke warmly: and Nancy got up and kissed her, and laughed, and said, with her bright curls tickling Miss Burchell's broad face, "You silly old Sal!" But all the same, there was a faint deepening of colour on Nancy's cheeks which did not escape silly old Sal's observation.

As it happened, it was Moor himself who rounded off their evening. Coming into the parlour, in driving coat and neck shawl, he stood almost silent for a few minutes, with his back to the fire: asked Nancy how she had enjoyed herself: and fell silent again, until the clock in the kitchen struck ten—in Inglethorpe a late hour—and Miss Burchell said, "Well?" meaningly.

A twinkle came into Moor's eyes. "That means I'm to go, I suppose," he said. As he had expected, it was Miss Burchell who came downstairs with him to see him out. When her hand was on the latch of the door, he mumbled, "I thought it was no good saying anything before Nancy and distressing her, but the fact is, I was called in to-night to see old Heywood—and I don't like the look of him."

Sarah Burchell paused, with her hand on the latch.

"That's bad," she said. "What's the matter?"

It was the age when the doctor always had an imposing name for everything: bemused his patients, and sometimes himself, by his Latinity: and never confessed to ignorance. But Moor had quite the courage of his.

"I'm not sure," he said. "But if it's what I think it is, it is only a question of time."

Sarah Burchell stood for a minute or two looking out after him into the windy night.

It is true, perhaps, of most of us, as Thackeray said of himself, that one doesn't love people, or only a very, very few. It was not a sense of personal loss, but the thought of dear old Elizabeth Heywood, who had been so thoroughly and innocently happy, that made Sarah Burchell's heart and step heavy as she went upstairs; and she was distinctly cross with Nancy for being still up, kneeling before the fire, instead of having raked it out sensibly and gone to bed.

When her father was taken ill, Theodora Heywood very, naturally and rightly felt that if the old gamps or old servants, who were then generally called to the sick bed, could nurse, she could. She lent so acute an ear to Moor's directions, and asked him so few and such sensible questions, that it was soon decided that, as old Heywood insisted on having his wife in his room at night, Theo, with Louisa very much under her, should have charge of him by day. He was therefore much better nursed than was then common. If, through over confidence or inexperience, his daughter made mistakes, she covered up the tracks with great agility and ability: and it was certainly not the least necessary, when she dropped the most odious looking black draught on the carpet instead of pouring it down his throat, that the patient (falsely so called) should put a red and wrathful old face through the bed-curtains and ask her, with a very strong expletive, what she was doing *now*?

All old gentlemen, from William IV. downwards, swore when provoked: so it meant nothing. Still, it was naturally far more satisfactory to abuse Louisa, who wept when addressed as an old fool, and said, in her tottering old voice, "You *did* say jelly this time, sir, you did, indeed!" while Theo would reply with a magnificent self-control, "Certainly, papa, I evidently mistook your orders," in the tone in which

one humours a lunatic: and her father, feeling he was being humoured, became twice as fractious as before.

It did indeed seem unjust that her self-control was so often met by testiness and her patience by growls from the pillows. But perhaps it seemed rather than was; for it is only love which can justly demand love in return.

In the nights, when Theo in her own room was sleeping the sound sleep of youth and fatigue, Madam, bringing her husband the cup of soup she had heated, found neither crossness nor ingratitude. He would take her plump hand in his, and say, "Don't you be catching cold now, Betsy: you go back to bed. I'm all right." And Betsy—she was a matter-of-fact old dear and not in the least sentimental—would kiss the plain face under its tasselled nightcap, pat his shoulder, and say, "There's no need to worry about me, John," and presently do as she was bid.

As they lay wakeful sometimes—old Madam watching the flickering fire from her couch, and the patient with his bed-curtains pulled aside to do the same—they would talk of and plan for Theo.

Once, Madam said comfortably, "It's sure to be all right, John, when she's married and has children. Women with two or three haven't any time to do queer things": and John said severely that he hoped King would keep her in order, and that Providence didn't mean the woman to be on top.

Mrs. Heywood—who would have been puzzled to say if she or John had been "on top" and only knew that they had been very happy—received these retrograde sentiments with perfect equanimity: and in a few minutes, while the patient still lay thinking and watching the red firelight play on the solemn mahogany of the great wardrobe, a slight snore from the direction of the sofa revealed to him that his dear old wife was already tranquilly asleep.

His illness took the course which Moor had foreseen: which he himself doubtless knew and foresaw: but he was a man and a Briton, so he felt it behoved him always to say, when

his wife asked him, that he was feeling better, and in the face of death never to permit himself the cowardice of being dismal.

Moor was not only able, but, in a large, clumsy way, exceedingly kind. Knowing John Heywood liked a long visit, he would sit with him for an hour sometimes of a morning—to the neglect, it may be supposed, of other patients. One night, about nine o'clock, Heywood seeming very uneasy, Moor was sent for a second time. When he had gone, and Theo was bringing in the soup and milk for the night, her father said, with a chuckle, "Half a bottle too much to-night, I think!"

And Theo replied quickly, with an indignant flush on her cheek, "I call it disgraceful! He has no business to attend his patients in that state!"

It is melancholy to have to record that to this unexceptional sentiment (which everybody would now endorse as a matter of course) Theo's father replied, "Hoity-toity, miss! Disgraceful? Parcel of nonsense! Lots of men are the better for it. What about Mr. Pitt, if you please? and Wilberforce? and old Billy himself? Disgraceful? Stuff and nonsense!"

The next morning Theo received Moor, in the little room adjoining her father's, with a crushing dignity which he certainly deserved: forced his eye to meet her very clear and firm one: when he gave some order, replied, faintly triumphant, "You gave me quite contrary instructions last night!"

On which he looked up, faced her squarely, and not without humour in his clever and ugly face, said, "Very likely I did, Miss Theo—'after dinner is after dinner.'"

Miss Burchell and Nancy had of course been constantly to Beech House, inquiring for the invalid: but it was not until his illness was six weeks old that he expressed a desire to see any visitor, and then asked for his old, young favourite, Nancy. Miss Burchell joined Mrs. Heywood in the kitchen

where she was busy, and Theo, having taken Nancy to the invalid's room, left them together. Nancy had on the French bonnet of which David King had caught brief sight from the top of his retreating coach: and in its shadow her face was as soft and fresh as a rose. The old man in the bed looked at her very attentively: his own Theo was twice as handsome: but the treasonable idea suddenly crossed his mind that if he had been a young man, he would twice as soon have married Nancy. Watching her out of his tired old eyes, they talked very cheerfully of Paris, and then of Theo's engagement to David King, until the sad alteration in the kind face of this dear old friend gripped Nancy suddenly, as it were, by the throat, and she stooped, impulsively kissed his thin, gnarled hand lying on the counterpane, and said with tears in her voice, "*Do make haste and get well, Uncle John. Pray, pray do!!*" and kissed his hand again.

He was touched by her affection: he had always been fond of Nancy. For a minute he said nothing. Then, "I'll do my best, ma'am."

And at that, perhaps opportune, moment Theodora came in and closed the interview.

That evening, at Ferry Cottage, after their eight o'clock tea, Miss Burchell turned her book—a work of brown and solid appearance—face downwards on her knee, and looking at Nancy rather searchingly, said without preamble,

"We must not regret too much, you know, that dear old John Heywood should die. 'To live is to outlive'—and it is really better for us all that we should leave the world before its joys and interests leave us. And you know, Nancy, you give yourself a lot of unnecessary suffering by exaggerating other people's and by assuming that they always feel what you would feel, perhaps, if you were in their place. You will find out some day that there are quite a number of people who do not feel at all, and a great many more who feel acutely for a short time, and then recuperate, and re-

cover so thoroughly they actually forget they were ever miserable. I don't mean that Mrs. Heywood is one of these; but she will have much past happiness to draw upon. While Theo—" here Miss Burchell kicked the beaded stool at her feet rather impatiently—"will always be the heroine of her own tragedy, and that's very consoling."

Nancy had on her lap a ridiculous mongrel puppy, which Moor had saved for her from the watery grave to which a bandy paw and a local farmer had condemned it. She was now nourishing it with warm milk out of an egg-spoon from a saucer, while a kitten—herself sadly overfed—watched the proceedings jealously from the puppy's basket.

"It's a very dismal thing, though, Sal," she said, looking up from her occupation, "to have nothing but memories to be happy on. I can't *bear* to think all the realities are over for poor Aunt Heywood. Whatever you say, I couldn't endure myself to feel all my real life was in the past."

"You haven't had any real life yet, you know," says Sarah Burchell, looking at her: "when you have, you will feel differently": and she took up the solid book and, as it were, set her intellectual teeth into it.

Three weeks later John Heywood died—and, like the rich man in the parable, not only died but was buried—that is, buried with the paraphernalia which divided wealth and poverty, even in death. Inglesby plunged itself into the deepest black: the church was hung with it: mutes on horseback, paupers from the almshouse (lugubriously dressed at Mrs. Heywood's expense), the boys and girls of the Charity School, and all the landaus and barouches of the neighbourhood followed the dead man to his grave. The next Sunday, Anstruther preached his old friend's funeral sermon, in that direct and forcible style of which he was a master. If Miss Winter had estimated her employer as a coarse, ignorant old tradesman, fit for nothing but his stupid business, Anstruther not only knew, with Dr. Johnson, that there are very few,

ways in which a man can be so innocently employed as in making money, but that this one had laid up treasure little for himself and much for his wife and child; and that in the slowness and solidity of his mind, the steady energy of his character—his stoutness, narrowness, honesty—he was not untypical of the old John Bull—"the churl . . . who loves to help you at a pinch . . . says No, and serves you."

When his affairs came to be looked into they were in the perfect order which might have been expected. Anstruther and a brother-in-law of Mrs. Heywood's, who, himself very ill, could not act, and old Mr. Clutterbuck were the executors of his Will; so it fell to Theo to receive explanations and instructions from the latter gentleman, whose brains she had so openly despised, upon points which to him were as clear as daylight and of which she was, most naturally and inevitably, wholly ignorant.

Anstruther, warming his back at the library fire in Beech House, derived a cynic joy from the superb dignity of the pupil's manner; and when old Clutterbuck said, "My dear Miss Theo, I don't think you quite apprehend the meaning"—of this or that, he had to turn his face to the fire; and had to poke the same vigorously, when, with a magnificent assurance, Theo dashed in her signature—in the wrong place.

If her character had often angered her father, yet, after all, she inherited much of it from him, and his Will showed a reluctant sympathy with it by leaving her, directly, a sum large enough to make her independent of her mother in bonnets and books, but not large enough to enable her to take her patrimony and develop her nature in a separate establishment.

To be sure, she would not have done it. She was dutiful or nothing. In those first dark days she attended on her mother with every filial attention and took her place as head of the house with an assurance which, indeed, was very greatly resented by old Janet and Louisa, but was both useful and convenient. Long before the Will was proved, the im-

portance of her own position—present and future—had impressed itself markedly on her mind and manner: and King had been right in suspecting that the indifference to money, which she had expressed to him, would not have outlasted the lack of it.

During her father's illness, and since his death, when Theo had naturally been greatly occupied, Nancy had seen a great deal of Mrs. King: the two had become fast friends, and, before she knew it was a habit, the guest had fallen into one of sitting on the sofa in the flickering firelight in the Grey Priory drawing-room on those dreary November afternoons, with her bonnet on her lap, listening to his mother's whole *répertoire* of stories about David. For though Nancy had a quickness of mind and a soundness of judgment which all the experience of life had not been able to teach Mrs. King, there was a fundamental sympathy between them in that both were typically feminine—formed in heart, as in body, for their natural vocation. Nancy's tender and admiring interest in David's first blue kid shoes, his lace frock, and a most engaging miniature of him at two, was perfectly spontaneous: the two women kissed when they parted that afternoon: and on their next meeting, Camilla, with a very slight and unconvincing feint of the idea having suddenly and unexpectedly occurred to her, produced the school reports in which Mr. Pilmer had so lied urbanely about Master David King as to leave the impression that that Admirable Crichton required nothing to complete his mental perfection, save, possibly, a *souçon* more Roman history, or a thought more English grammar.

About six weeks after John Heywood's death, a violent influenza stalked through Inglethorpe, claiming among its victims both Nancy and Mrs. King and stopping their meetings: while, in consideration of Moor's new-fangled idea that disease was conveyed, rather than expressly bestowed by Providence or inherited from progenitors, Beech House refrained from visiting the sick in their affliction.

It was, therefore, after an interval of about a fortnight, on the first afternoon on which Nancy was abroad again, that she and Miss Burchell set out to call on Mrs. King.

The November day was lowering, and at three o'clock the fire in the Priory drawing-room was as necessary for light as for heat and cheering. Camilla, who at that hour was nearly always on her sofa with her work-table at her side, was sitting quite upright, with two vivid spots of colour on her cheeks. At a little distance from her, also upright, and in her careless flowing black draperies, looking rather like a widowed empress—an empress without a lady's-maid—was Theodora. The expression of her handsome face—the handsomeness which could triumph over a bonnet not more becoming than a kitchen coal-scuttle and exceedingly like it—was perfectly determined: and it was easy to see, whatever the situation, the younger woman had the whip-hand of it.

After the usual greetings, she took the initiative and, with that stateliness which is only stately until it oversteps the thin line which divides the sublime from the ridiculous, turned to Miss Burchell and said in an elderly manner, "Mama and Mrs. King and I have come to an arrangement which we think will turn out a satisfactory one. Mama is going to Bath to be with her widowed sister for six or eight months, and I am going to live here with Mrs. King, and get used to my future home and duties."

There was the sudden silence of surprise.

Then Nancy said impulsively, and to fill the gap, "Fancy, Theo! and I suppose dear old Beech House will be shut up?" She was sitting next Camilla, who suddenly put her thin little hand over Nancy's, and held it tight.

Theo replied, tolerantly, "That detail is not arranged"; and Miss Burchell, who was watching her sharply, observed rather tartly that six months was a long time. She had not missed a certain hunted and beseeching look in Mrs. King's eyes. Besides, her experience of life had taught her that weak people are always getting themselves into predicaments

from which they look to the strong to deliver them—vainly, as a rule, since it is as easy to fall into a pit as it is difficult, or impossible, to be hauled out of it.

“David would be very pleased with the arrangement, I know,” said Theo, perhaps discounting possible criticism (and Sarah Burchell bethought herself, “Men are so simple, I daresay he would!”) “and I shall be able to continue my own interests and employments and, at the same time, take some of the housekeeping worries from Mrs. King’s shoulders.”

At this Camilla, looking frightened, Nancy thought, looked up with the colour spots on her cheeks deepening, and said, “Oh, I don’t have any, Theo! Susan sees to it all.”

And when Theo made benign answer, “I hope I shall be at least as capable as Susan, dear Mrs. King,” the silence that followed the remark was hardly flattering.

In it, Bridget opened the door and announced Anstruther.

As he shook hands, he looked round the little party. “You’re all a bit dull, aren’t you?” he said, with his sardonic chuckle. “Well, the weather’s the deuce. How do these fogs suit poor Forrest’s throat?” and he turned, with another chuckle, to Mrs. King.

Camilla, herself incapable of sarcasm, never recognised it, and replied in perfect good faith that poor Archibald and Adelaide were, as usual, compelled to keep to the house during the autumn; and then Sarah Burchell strode across these *banalités* and told Anstruther of the arrangement which had been come to between Mrs. King and Theo.

Anstruther said, “Oh, ho! oh, ho!” and in the firelight looked sharply from one face to the other. He was never the fool to offer an opinion where it was not asked.

As if to preclude the possibility of his doing so, Theodora struck in with, “Do you know how poor old Hatchett is to-day?”

And Anstruther, playing up to his character as read by Theo of an idler in the vineyard, replied indifferently, “Oh,

he's Moor's business, not mine," without mentioning he had visited the invalid on his way to the Grey Priory.

The four visitors left together, the two girls walking well ahead of their elders, who were out of the Priory drive before Sarah Burchell broke silence by saying, "There ought to be an act of parliament compelling some women to re-marry directly the first husband has taken his departure! Now, even that little What-you-call-him from What's-its-name—with the telescope—if he'd married her as he wanted to, would have been sensible enough to prevent her from submitting to an arrangement like that. Why didn't the little fool ask me?"

Anstruther said, "Theo took good care she shouldn't." Loving to lead Sarah on, he added, "It may answer all right. You never can tell."

"Answer!" said Miss Burchell, roused. "She'll have the house topsy-turvy and the servants by the ears in three weeks. That little woman won't dare to call her soul her own with Theo lording it over her with her virtuous airs. Answer! Those unnatural arrangements of women living together never answer—and Providence doesn't mean 'em to!"

Anstruther chuckled. "It's not natural for an aunt and niece to keep house together, I suppose," he said, "yet that has been known to answer."

Sarah Burchell replied, "There you have me, Richard," and spoke not one other word until they parted at Ferry Cottage.

CHAPTER X

THE UNCO' GUID

NEVER prophesy unless you know—a great deal about human nature, is a sound axiom; to it might be added, Never give a date for the fulfilment of your prophecies, for human nature is often as slow, if as sure, in its processes as Nature itself.

For six weeks or so after Mrs. Heywood had left Beech House for Bath, the arrangement at the Grey Priory seemed to work very well.

Theo was welcomed both as a novelty and a compliment at the Charity School, where she soon started taking a class of little girls, and in various cottages where the maxim, Leave the poor to help themselves (a sound one, though it is "the interest of the rich to preach it"), had been observed almost literally.

Not quite, however. Here and there Theo found (and was not perfectly pleased to find) that Miss Burchell had been before her—teaching an invalid girl to sew, or looking after a sick child; while, in one notorious case, Anstruther, by means of unsparing discipline, helped by the ruthless use of his sarcastic tongue, had turned a sot and a toper into a self-respecting human being and the best groom he had. From the wife, Theo learnt of the rector's high-handed plan of paying the delinquent's wages entirely by an order on the village shop for food and clothing; and also of the rector's practical advice to another woman, who had come to him, weeping, with a black eye administered by her husband—"You're a big strong woman—give him one back"; which she had done—with the happiest results.

Theo pursed her mouth slightly when she heard this story; but she came across other instances where the rector's methods were not only drastic but also liberal and merciful; while the few cottages he owned were invariably in excellent repair; and if the tenants had a grudge against him, it was for forcing upon them decencies to which they had no inclination. This certainly was not the case in the many hovels owned by Forrest, who was notorious, even in that day, for his negligence as a landlord; while the cottages which went with the estate of the Grey Priory, though better, were only relatively better. But as Miss Heywood had been brought up to think it as natural that the lower classes should dwell in a state of squalor and discomfort as that the upper classes should not, she did not trouble herself with a problem which, after all, governments have continually shirked and shelved, so she contented herself with offering excellent moral advice; urged on the parents to come to church and the children to the Sunday School Anstruther had established when such schools were still a rarity; and, as a high mind and intentions are never without effect, effected something. If her grand-daughter would scorn her methods, so she—respectfully—scorned her mother's. Thus are the fathers avenged on the children.

One December morning, Miss Burchell met Miss Heywood emerging from one of the miserable shanties belonging to Forrest and close to Moor's house, and they walked towards the village together.

Says Sarah Burchell tartly, "Are you attempting to reform the Masters? You might as well try your hand on the Old Gentleman himself."

Theo, in clipped tones, replied severely, "Mrs. Masters is ill. I am allowing her seven-and-sixpence a week till she is better"; and Miss Burchell rejoined, "Then she never will be!"

The younger woman had the art of maintaining a crushing silence, which the elder envied and resented. She could

not help adding now, "You had a deal better buy yourself a new bonnet!"

Theo said, really good-temperedly, all things considered, "Is this one so shabby?" adding, on a superior note, "I am afraid I don't take much trouble about my appearance."

To which Miss Burchell made instant answer, "Neither do I about mine! The more fools both of us. I suppose it's our conceit that makes us think we are so virtuous and charming we can afford not to bother about our looks."

To be bracketted with an elderly spinster in clogs, her skirt turned up over a linsey-wolsey petticoat, and a shawl about her shoulders which Theo could remember ever since her own childhood, was hardly pleasant for the handsome heiress of Beech House.

Unable to think of a dignified set-me-down, she was, for the first time in her life, glad to see Anstruther, who, driving his phaeton and pair himself, pulled up and gave her a chance of escape.

Indicating the retreating figure, Sarah Burchell said, "That young woman ruffles my feathers; she always puts me in the wrong."

"Perhaps you *are* wrong," answered Anstruther, with his eye on the cobs, restive to start.

And Miss Burchell replied ambiguously, "That is exactly what I complain of."

In a week or two, the village learnt that the Clothing Club, hitherto grievously and good-naturedly muddled by Mrs. Clutterbuck, had been taken over by Miss Heywood. The Sunday after this transition had been effected, Theo and Nancy walking down the hill together after morning service, Theo tried to rope in Nancy, as it were, to assist her in this, and other, undertakings—not indeed as equal and coadjutor, for Theo, having, as an only child, always been *the* one, would fain be *the* one for ever, and have all her *entourage* satellites or ciphers.

Nancy shook her pretty head quite decidedly; she lacked

neither courage nor character. "Really not, Theo!" she said. "Sal and I haven't time. We have lots of friends among the poor people, but when you do all your own house-work you can't do many clothing clubs and things as well."

Theo replied severely, "Surely you would feel your life less empty and objectless if you spent more of it in the service of others!"

And Nancy, beginning to laugh and looking up at Theo with her bright eyes, said, "Oh, Theo, after we've done the cooking and the cleaning and the mending, Sal and I don't feel a bit empty and objectless, I can assure you!"

"Still, your work is all for yourselves, isn't it?" Theo pursued.

And Nancy replied with spirit, "Well, anyhow, I can't leave it all to Sal; and if we neither of us did it we should be as dirty as the Masters themselves, and take to drink in despair and come on the parish": and she laughed her fresh young laugh.

So, the next day, and many other days, it was Laura Clutterbuck who was to be seen fatly panting with parcels up the hill to the village school, where the Clothing Club held its *rendezvous*—with Theo, actually and symbolically, well in front of her and negotiating the Mountain of Difficulty with perfect ease, swiftness and aplomb.

Nancy still very often ran up to the Grey Priory to see Mrs. King, and, nearly always finding Theo out, rightly judged from Camilla's eager disclaimer of loneliness that she was not at all anxious to keep Theo in.

In point of fact, when Theo was, as she was constantly, twenty minutes or so late for dinner, which took place at the then late hour of six, it was only Susan who was enraged. Mrs. King was culpably meek and weak in every dealing with her future daughter-in-law; when Theo most nobly put down her book in the evenings after tea and proposed to play spillikins with her hostess, she had not the courage to say that she too disliked that abominable game

and would much rather have been spared it: so the two sat, as often happens with women, each sacrificing herself to the other and wearing a hair-shirt for nothing. Still, they did not disagree. When, before Christmas, Camilla took to her bed with a severe feverish cold, Theo was so dutiful and attentive, giving up her parish work to wait on the invalid, and Camilla was so grateful, that warmer relations than had seemed possible with characters so different began to be established between them. To be sure, as always happens, the patient's return to ordinary life broke the spell.

Anstruther, calling to inquire, met Theodora one morning with the Clothing Club account books under her arm in the Priory drive, and received the rather cold reply that the invalid was much better; in fact, Theo considered, would be perfectly well if she took a little more interest in her fellow creatures.

It was only Anstruther, or Sarah, his relative, who would have had the rude courage to reply, "And how long is it, Miss Theo, since *you* began to take an interest in yours?" And then, with his hands behind his back and his eyes on the ground, he said meditatively, as if unconscious of Theo's presence, "That's the worst of women! They can't believe there's any good work done in the world except what they happen to be doing themselves at the moment. She's made that boy of hers uncommon fond of her, anyhow."

Theo rejoined icily, "I had supposed children were generally fond of their parents!"

And Anstruther, shaking his head, said, "That's your ignorance, my dear young woman—that's your ignorance."

On Christmas Day, the Forrests, still of course hermetically sealed in Inglethorpe Place, had a dinner-party. A rich, childless, elderly couple can be one of the saddest sights in this world. In the Forrests' case, the stately old rooms, the magnificent pictures, the delicate china and bijouterie, which made their house one of the most enviable in the neighbourhood, gave a strange impression of futility—of wealth

heaped up that a stranger might gather it, of flouted nature—the serpent in Eden—working out her subtle revenge. The Clutterbucks' excessive family—with their good-tempered, shiny faces and their little black beady eyes—were a thing much more reasonable and happy.

Sarah Burchell, who always said everything she chose to say, remarked to Anstruther in a low voice as—the two earliest arrivals—they stood waiting their host and hostess before the great Christmas fire in the beautiful old parlour, "Now this house wants a baker's dozen of children in it; and, you may depend on it, if Archibald were paying Bobbie's debts at college and Tommy's bills at Eton and Julia's frills and furbelows, he wouldn't have an ache or a pain in his body, and that poor Adelaide would be as cheerful and bouncing as old Mother Clutterbuck herself."

Anstruther, with his eyes fixed on the blazing logs, said in a gentler tone than was common with him, "I suppose it's always a bitter thing for people who haven't had any chances to see luckier ones throwing away theirs." After a pause, he added on his usual sarcastic note, "Or one of the compensations of life—just as you choose to take it! Still, we must allow them to mismanage their own affairs." Looking up, he added, "You were wrong about that one at the Priory. It seems to work pretty smoothly."

And Sarah Burchell merely looked at him.

Then the Forrests came in.

Nancy, who had been staying the night before at the Clutterbucks', arrived with five of them; Camilla and Theo were a little late (Theo very impressive in her rigid black); and the party—it was indeed an informal one, or Theo's mourning would have prevented her being present—was completed by the Drivers, cousins of Adelaide Forrest; and, last of all, by Moor, who arrived after the fish and slipped quietly into his vacant place next to Nancy.

The menus of such feasts—one lies before the writer—make one at once marvel at the excellence of our grand-

parents' digestions and cease to marvel at the degeneracy of those they bequeathed to ourselves. Forrest and his wife were hardly genial hosts; but all hosts then pressed all viands insistently on all guests: every one enthusiastically took wine with every one else—Forrest feeling it necessary to apologise for his own melancholy abstinence, as if it were a sin—and, at dessert, drank healths enthusiastically. After dinner, there was music, part-singing and choruses, as a matter of course. It seemed to Miss Burchell that Moor's heavy figure was always somewhere near Nancy's slight one: when she sang to the harp, he was the only person who did not join in the general chorus of thanks; but as she sat down again near him, he said something to her in a low voice, and the warm colour swept her cheeks and her eyes faltered. Then George Clutterbuck—Nancy's old admirer of the dancing class—a rotund little person, with the rubicund family complexion, came up to the two and chatted cheerfully under the delusion that he was making himself agreeable.

When all the young people gathered about a table for a round game, Theo stood aloof. The little ring on the third finger of her left hand conferred many distinct advantages; this evening accorded its wearer the distinguished position of being the only woman neither married, elderly nor unappropriated; and she was rather flattered when presently her host came and sat by her on the sofa, and laid before her—it was Christmas time, when Forrest, as well as anyone else, had a right to enjoy himself—some of the disadvantages of his lot.

As she and Mrs. King drove back to the Grey Priory in the barouche which the severe weather made a necessity, Camilla said in her fervent voice, "What a pleasant evening it has been, Theo, and *wasn't* it kind of Archibald to propose David's health so warmly, especially as he isn't at all fond of him, and, as Davie says, can't be expected to be!"

Theo said, "Very kind indeed!" with some presence of mind. For, sitting at the further end of the long table,

engrossed in impressing her superiority to the other young women upon Mr. Driver, she now heard of the toast for the first time.

In these days, when "social service and philanthropy have" indeed "run mad" and every woman, if not every man, has her pet scheme—sane or silly—for the regeneration of somebody else, a young woman who instituted anything so commonplace as a Bible Class for domestic servants would attract no comment, unless it might be one on her want of originality. But when, in January, Theo embarked on this course, she quite fluttered the doves of Inglethorpe, and even, which was highly stimulating, roused a little opposition, Mrs. Heywood wrote six crossed sheets from Bath to say that, of the maids left at Beech House, only those on the further side of thirty were to be allowed, upon any excuse, to perambulate the country lanes on dark winter afternoons. Anstruther said his household had to listen to his sermonising twice on Sunday, and he thought that was enough for anyone; Miss Burchell had no servants; Moor gladly contributed his, on the principle that the less he saw of her the more comfortable he was; Mrs. Clutterbuck sent four; the Forrests, despairing of the regeneration of the whole class, but willing to catch, as it were, at this last straw, sent five; and an Evangelical family in Dartford another three. So that, with two from its own kitchen, the Priory dining-room on Thursday afternoons had quite a goodly company to listen to Theo explaining—with great outward aplomb, and, at first, some inward qualms—the Parables and Miracles of the New Testament.

Susan at once firmly and curtly declined to be of the party. When her mistress said, "Oh, but, Susan, I think Miss Theo will be hurt!" Susan merely sniffed; and Camilla, returning to the drawing-room and the sock she was knitting for David, tried hard not to foresee what kitchens call "unpleasantness."

The fact of the matter was that, when she had been ill upstairs, she had weakly and rashly consented to Theo's ordering the dinner; and coming downstairs again had yet more weakly submitted to a continuance of that arrangement; while, when Theo said amiably, "I am sure you won't want to be bothered with carving!" Camilla, knowing, in the soul of her, how sharply Henry would have disapproved, and herself disapproving, of that abdication, had, not the less, relinquished the head of her own table—as she believed, for ever.

Sometimes, of an evening, when she had gone to her room, Susan would come up to it and stand for half an hour complaining bitterly to her old mistress of her new.

"She don't know nothing—Janet told me as much—the old lady tried to teach her, but Janet said as how she'd always her nose in the air—too proud to learn. And *then* to tell *me* as I use too much dripping—" etc., etc.

Whereon Camilla interposed very earnestly, with tears in her pretty eyes, "Oh, don't quarrel with Miss Theo, Susan—pray, pray, don't! Think of Master Davie!" Susan replied darkly, "It's him I *do* think of, ma'am"; and that night poor Camilla cried herself to sleep.

Things were not made smoother by Theo's avocations in the parish—they bred and grew as such things always do—causing her to request breakfast an hour earlier than usual, and to be more and more often late for dinner—that sacred and solemn meal—at which she arrived with a manner of exaggerated calm, flurried hair and her evening frock cast on in a manner that would have earned Mrs. Heywood's outspoken reprobation. It was very likely because Theo had had too little power and freedom that she was not now judicious in the use of them—as he who has been kept too short of money will nearly always be spendthrift when he has it; the *esprit de principauté*—to rule, to manage, to lead—was strong in her; and being really conscientious, her settled con-

viction that she knew and wished only what was right, made her to such a nature as Camilla's quite terrifying.

For instance, when Mrs. King, lying on the drawing-room sofa with one of the nervous headaches to which she was subject, heard her guest's step in the hall, she would hurriedly put down her feet, sit upright and, by the time Theo entered, try to look as if she were busily engaged in something useful, and thereby counteract Theo's opinion of her as a chronic idler and a *malade imaginaire*.

Camilla, like most people in her day, was accustomed to do, so far as possible, without oxygen; but when Theo, coming in from a brisk walk in the frozen open—vigorous, healthy, and glowing with youth and strength—said, "How close this room is! I am sure you will feel better for an open window!" and opened it, Camilla had not the chance, if she had had the courage, to say that she would feel decidedly worse, and that a draught gave her neuralgia. So she shivered in a shawl until Theo was well out of the house again, when she rose and surreptitiously excluded the obnoxious ventilation.

She talked very little of David to his wife to be; nor had she ever shown her the treasures of his blue shoes and his lace frock, which it had seemed natural to display to Miss Burchell and Nancy. She fancied when she timidly said sometimes, "David likes this," or "does not like that," that the "Really?" or "Indeed?" with which Theo received the statements meant, "I shall soon change that": or perhaps a jealousy that the mother should pretend to so close an acquaintance with the heart of the son of her body, who, after all, had been, in very truth, bone of her bone, flesh of her flesh, and whom she had known all his four and twenty years, while Theo had been acquainted with him not half so many months.

With all her defects and omissions as a housewife, Camilla had always had the gentle art—not too common—of making a house a home. But even into the Grey Priory—that "haunt

of ancient peace," with its charming incongruous furniture, its book-lined walls, its comfortable deep chairs, and broad hearths—a person who never shut a door in her wake or failed to leave in it a scarf, a bonnet, a sheaf of papers or a crumpled pair of gloves: who was always in and out, up and down, busy, but far from businesslike, did bring with her an element of restlessness and discomfort which would have driven Henry (whose belief it had been that very little that is done in the world is not done in order and its proper season) quite distracted.

And what about Henry's son?

Nancy, coming in to see Mrs. King on those short winter afternoons, nearly always found her alone sitting close into the fire, with her pretty thin hands deplorably idle on her lap—thinking and thinking of David, in the uttermost parts of the sea. Nancy knew she was so thinking, because she nearly always began talking of him immediately, as one who has many things to say and has been obliged to repress them; while, once at least, Nancy fetched Charles Forrest's great map from the book-shelf, and tried to discover from Camilla's remarkably vague information the probable course of her son's present voyage. Latitude, longitude and the equator were all one to Mrs. King—annoyances perversely invented by the geographer to make his art more vexatious and difficult: the constant company of a globe was required to convince her that the world was indeed round and that the places she saw at that moment—flat on the hearthrug—really, in her own phrase, joined at the back: and it is quite likely that when maps and globes were put away neither she nor Nancy was immensely the wiser.

Where Nancy was the wiser was in her knowledge of David. True, when she came to know him in the flesh, reality killed fancy as it always does, and she found it difficult even to remember the idea she had formed of him from his mother's stories and a certain brave and wretched letter the youth had indited before starting on his first, worst voy-

age on the "Princess Amelia." If the courage of that brief and blotted epistle had deceived the mother as it was meant to do, it hurt Nancy as the useless pain of the little and helpless always hurt her: her heart shrank from it as naturally as flesh shrinks from the searing iron: she tried to put it from her and forget it entirely.

When her conversation with Mrs. King touched Theo, as of course it did sometimes, it skimmed away without comment; until one dreary February day when, the frost having broken, a pall of white fog hung over the fields and the river; and Nancy, coming into the Priory drawing-room, found Mrs. King not only alone as usual, but crying quietly to herself by the fire.

Uncertain if she would do well to see, or to be blind to that emotion, Nancy chose the latter course, took off her bonnet, and, sitting down on the floor by Camilla, leant her head against her and said, "Isn't it a horrid, depressing day? Sal says it is only because most English people have never seen a Southern winter that they don't get up and emigrate to Italy in a body!"

Camilla did not answer. Then she wound one of Nancy's bright curls round her forefinger, and said in a voice fraught with omens, "Nancy! Susan is going away!"

"Susan!" said Nancy, "who has been with you all these years! Why?"

Then Camilla spoke—in a low voice, and first looking cautiously about her as if she were compounding a treason.

"It's Theo," she said. "Theo has upset things very much. You know she took over the housekeeping, out of kindness, when I was ill: and when I was well again she thought she had better keep it on—to get used to it for the future. Susan did not like that at all. She and Theo have had—words—several times. I begged Susan not to take any notice, but she says she has put up with being treated as if she were a Scorpion—that was Susan's expression"—here Mrs. King

faintly smiled, "by an ignorant chit, quite long enough! and she gave notice two days ago."

Nancy laughed a little herself: then she turned her head and kissed Camilla's hand. "But I daresay she won't go really," she said comfortingly, "when she thinks it over."

"Oh, yes, she will," Camilla answered in the same low voice. "I tried to persuade her. I *implored* her to stay—Henry would have thought it very foolish and undignified—I said I would give twice the wages, without Theo knowing anything about it: and that made her worse than ever, for she said bags of gold wouldn't have tempted her away from me and Davie, and I ought to have known it; and bags of gold wouldn't make her stay, with Theo lording it over her. So she is going: and Eliza, whom Susan hates, is to be made cook—Susan says Theo likes her because Eliza pretends to enjoy the Bible Class so much, but I daresay it isn't that at all—and Bridget will go with Susan."

There was silence, while Nancy sought in her mind, and failed, to find a path out of this domestic maze.

Presently she felt something that must have been a tear fall on her hair: and Camilla said in a sad whisper, "I often wonder how David will agree with Theo—he is very strong-willed himself!"

Here Nancy was on surer ground, and felt able to be really consoling.

She said, "Oh, don't worry about that, Mrs. King! Sal often says it is just the people you would never think would get on at all who are the happiest when they are married. My cousin, George Legard—the most hideous, disagreeable, tyrannical old thing—was perfectly adored by his wife—and the more ill-tempered he got, the fonder she was of him. And of course Theo isn't a bit like that: and I except she will be devoted to David and this dear old house, and quite meek—and ordinary. I really think so!"

Camilla, however, really did not. She shook her head with a faint smile; and the two sat in silence until, hearing the

bang of a door and then a quick step in the hall, they moved apart as if they had been criminals, conspiring.

Theo came in with a brisk, "Oh, is it you, Nancy? Why are you sitting in the dark? Shall I ring for Bridget, Mrs. King?" Without waiting a reply, she rang and commanded candles.

By their light, her face, above her tippet of dark, soft fur, looked very young and glowing and a little hard.

As she threw the fur from her shoulders, and began pulling off her gloves, the door opened again, and Miss Burchell was announced.

She nodded at Theo as she greeted Mrs. King. "That's the difference," she said, "between Young and Slim and Old and Fat—five minutes more *en route*. I saw you in front of me, Theo, all the way from the village. Still, I get there—in time. I came to fetch Nancy—it's as dark as Erebus outside, so I expect it will be a case of the blind leading the blind and both falling into the ditch."

Theo's disapproval of scriptural quotations always inspired Miss Burchell to make them: otherwise, she rather disapproved of them herself.

Nancy pressed Theo's arm meaningly, and the two girls, leaving Miss Burchell and Mrs. King together, went into the hall, where there was a fine fire of logs, and stood by it together.

At once and impetuously Nancy said, "Oh, Theo, she—" nodding at the closed drawing-room door, "is so upset at Susan's going—can't you persuade her to stay?"

Theo drew herself up, and answered with a great deal of dignity and composure, "I should not do so if I could. Mama says—and you will allow, Nancy, she knows something of housekeeping—that if a servant wishes to leave, it is the greatest mistake to prevent her. You probably don't realise, not having maids of your own, what tyrants old servants can be."

Nancy looked down at the glowing logs, then up to Theo's

face, and made one more effort. "Oh, but, Theo," she said, "won't Mr. King be vexed when he comes home and finds Susan has been allowed to go?"

Theo's tone was as frigid as an icicle. "As you have never seen him," she said, "I fancy I am likely to know rather more than you about David's likes and dislikes."

Nancy laughed. "What a dreadful snub! and I deserved it all!"

Then, as the drawing-room door opened and Miss Burchell came out, her niece kissed Theo's rigid cheek: and Sarah Burchell, looking from one to the other and seeing Theo severely solemn, said, "What are you two girls laughing at now?"

It seems unnecessary to say, because it is self-evident, that Susan's departure from her house left a far greater blank in Mrs. King's life than would have been caused by the departure from this earth of most of her relatives and friends. Susan, in point of fact, had been one of the most intimate friends she had ever had: it was on Susan's virgin, but fat and comfortable, breast that little Davie had rested as an infant: and there Camilla had wept out so much of her grief as could dissolve itself in tears when Henry died: it was Susan who was now making David's life a martyrdom by the set of real, and really scratchy, Welsh flannel shirts she had made for him with her own hands: and when one of his rare letters came, Camilla had always hurried out at once to the kitchen to read it aloud.

She was in bed a whole day quite ill with grief when Susan actually left; and would have been in bed two, only Theo somehow looked so coldly surprised, and so evidently considered her malingering, that poor Camilla began to think so herself and came downstairs again. Still, always delicate and slight, she very soon became thin and fragile exceedingly.

It had already transpired that what Theo desired was power over the household, rather than efficiency in it: and now when she had issued a few orders in the morning in

rather lofty tones, she hurried out immediately to the parish work, which she liked much better and, rightly or wrongly, thought much more important. As all three maids were now young and unconscientious, and soon perceived that Miss Theo seldom looked to see if her orders had been carried out, they were not carried out; and Eliza lost no time in proving that she had little to recommend her for the post of cook save a squint, a vinegar aspect, and an addiction to Bible Classes.

Only a strong digestion and a bold spirit could have tackled the bleeding mutton and blackened beef she turned out: and though make-believe is an excellent thing, Theo's saying, "May I give you a little clear mock-turtle?" did not turn greasy water with a fragment of hard meat floating in it into that delectable soup, nor all the high-sounding titles in the cookery book Eliza's pies and puddings into things edible by a capricious appetite.

Camilla's worst enemy could never have called her a *bonne vivante*—if indeed that character can ever properly be put in the feminine; but she quickly reached now that state of starvation, not uncommon among women, which consists in living almost exclusively on cups of tea and pieces of toast.

Once, but only once, she plucked up a spirit. One evening at dessert (the only course Eliza had not ruined) she said tentatively, "Theo, dear, Eliza does not make us very comfortable, does she? or seem to improve?"

Theo, peeling an apple, paused, and stiffened her moral and physical backbone. "Eliza is not perhaps a perfect cook," she had the temerity to reply, "but she is a good young woman, with an excellent influence on the other two."

With a bright colour in her cheeks, Mrs. King said eagerly, "Oh, I am sure she is *morally* good, dear; but her pastry is dreadfully leathery, isn't it? and her things have such a curious taste at times—I don't know what she puts into them."

Theo merely replied sternly, "Of course, if you desire it,

I will give all the three notice at once: and we can make an entirely fresh start."

On which Mrs. King, foreseeing a second domestic upheaval on the very heels of the first, instantly retracted everything she had said, and found herself almost begging as a personal favour for the retention of Eliza in the household.

No one, of course, but a very weak woman could possibly have consented to be thus a cipher in her own house. Turning over David's clothes and boyish treasures in the chilly atmosphere of his little bedroom, Camilla used to rehearse a scene in her mind (being perfectly aware in her heart that she would never have the courage to enact it) in which, with immense spirit and determination, she resumed the control of the establishment. She certainly did manage, through all, to keep about herself a little zone of neatness, freshness and peace: and once, at least, Nancy found her furtively cutting out the fearful cobblings the new Bridget had made in the table linen and darning them afresh—saying, in a kind of apology, "You see, I mustn't let Uncle Charles' beautiful house-linen be ruined": while from the kitchen, and the maids who looked as if butter would not melt in their mouths when Theo was by, came every now and then loud laughings—one voice sounding oddly bass.

However, it was not their own mirth but Theo's Bible Class which was engrossing their ears and activities one Thursday afternoon when Nancy, having thrice rung the hall door bell in vain, ran round the garden to the drawing-room windows and tapped, like a robin, on the pane. Camilla quickly admitted her, and, with her, a soft gust of mild March air, for the frost of that long hard winter had given at last, and in the Priory garden the little heads of crocus and snowdrops had begun to show and the trees to turn the delicate soft red which presages the green.

Nancy's face was glowing and gay: and she slipped off her old winter pelisse, saying, "The weather is beginning to be nice again! and so is everything, Mrs. King! I ran down to

tell you I have a lovely invitation to go to London for a month for all sorts of dances and parties—and I am starting next Tuesday.”

Nancy had not been vain enough to guess how much space she had taken in Mrs. King's life until the dismayed look on the pretty, thin face told her now. But Camilla, at least since her marriage, was not a selfish woman. She evinced the eagerest interest in Nancy's frocks and gaities: presently fetched from her bedroom a little Mechlin lace tucker, which she had worn in the gown in which she had been married, and when Nancy, warmly admiring it, said, “Ought I to have it?” made answer that Theo had lots and lots of things and was wonderfully careless with them.

In a lower voice she said, “Oh, Nancy! I can't think what I shall do without you!”

Nancy did not pretend to misunderstand. “Oh, do stand up to Theo, Mrs. King,” she said. “It's so weak of us all to give in to her! Call in Sal sometimes—she's as bold as a lion. She doesn't respect Theo so dreadfully as we do—she says she likes her own way, and takes it as ruthlessly as anybody she ever saw—Sal is only *yearning* for an excuse to tell her so,” and Nancy laughed and stroked Mrs. King's hand.

Then she got up to go. “Do let me out the same way,” she said, “and then Theo won't know I've been here—she thinks I come much too often!”

She paused a moment by the open window. There was a gleam of watery sunshine in a sky timidly blue, and a passing shower had left the garden “like Niobe, all tears.”

“I feel as if I were eloping,” Nancy said, almost in a whisper and laughing a little (of course she knew all Camilla's story long before this). “It would be a lovely feeling, if only you could be *perfectly* sure the person waiting for you in the copse was the right person!” And for a second a shadow fell across her eyes.

Camilla said quickly, “Oh, you would never go to him,

dear, unless you were perfectly sure." Then she too laughed softly a little; a faint colour came into her face, and for a moment she was young again.

Nancy's visit was prolonged till nearly the end of April; and most of her absence Miss Burchell also spent in London with her invalid brother, and Ferry Cottage was closed.

She returned home on a Monday evening: on Tuesday morning, coming out of a cottage, Theo met Anstruther entering it.

As they parted, he said, looking at her rather attentively, "My cousin Sarah came home last night. She wants a word or two with Mrs. King this afternoon."

As he did not gratify Miss Heywood's curiosity as to what the "word" was about, she merely said, "Really?" in her most detached voice; and, as she descended the hill, Anstruther watched her slim figure—like an ambulant young poplar—with something meditative in his sarcastic eyes.

It was about five o'clock on that same afternoon that Mrs. King, after a somewhat prolonged interview with Miss Burchell upstairs, came into the drawing-room, to find Theo (with the fire at her back sinking unheeded into ashes) writing busily at a table much littered with papers, and with pelisse and bonnet thrown on to the sofa by her side. She could not, for the life of her, help looking up rather curiously at Mrs. King's face, which was not a little flushed and agitated.

Camilla, standing by the hearth and with her back to Theo, said at once, "Oh! Theo dear, Miss Burchell tells me all sorts of wrong things have been going on in our kitchen! Mr. Anstruther said that directly she was home she must come and speak to me about it. It appears that Eliza—" and in very nervous, hurried tones Mrs. King conveyed—in the strictly censored form in which such information had always to be toned down for the Young Person's consump-

tion—a displeasing story of deceit and intrigue between Theo's paragon and Drew, the groom, a young married man.

Theo turned on her chair and, with the pen still in her hand and a heightened colour on her cheeks, said, "I do not believe a word of it! There is much too much gossip in this place."

And indeed, in most small communities, to avoid calumny it is necessary to be not only as chaste as ice, and as pure as snow, but as old as Methuselah and as ugly as sin. The last condition Eliza certainly nearly fulfilled.

Theo added, "It is not as if Eliza were a flighty girl! I always notice at my Bible class what a quiet, respectful manner she has, and how attentively she listens."

Camilla said, without the least intentional sarcasm, "She is deaf in one ear, Theo dear. I don't know if that had anything to do with her apparent attention." On a surer note, she added, "I don't think in that class of life being very plain always keeps them good. Dear Henry used to say there is a vicious type of ugliness: he always avoided it; and I expect, you know, if Davie had been here he would have kept a firm hand on the men, which we have not done at all, I am afraid. It is always difficult for women to manage men: just as men are so sadly imposed on when they try to manage women servants. I think we must make quite a fresh start indoors, and get some one much older to be at the head of the kitchen."

Even beyond the impertinent interference of Anstruther and Miss Burchell, Theo resented the new note of confidence in Camilla's deprecating gentleness—the realisation that, though so much her inferior in brain power, Mrs. King was yet wiser than she was in the experience and the realities of life. However, Miss Heywood rarely obliged an adversary by losing her temper: when she did, it was in no vulgar and florid fashion. In a voice perfectly rigid and toneless she said that she should have been grateful if Mrs. King had not lent so ready an ear to detractors and scandalmongers: sug-

gested that she was jealous of her (Theo's) power, and ventured to remind her (with a politeness perfectly acid) that in a very short time her daughter-in-law would be by right and by duty the head of the household, and that if David had preferred his mother in that capacity he need not have sought a wife.

It must be regretfully said of Camilla that, if anyone attacked her, she always capitulated or fled. Still standing with her back to Theo, her tears fell fast on her hand which rested on the mantelshelf: she drew her shawl about her and shivered a little: and then made some vain and regrettable attempt at the soft answer which may sometimes turn away wrath, but very often only heartens and stimulates it to fresh exertions.

Theo resumed her pen and, with her back like a poker, pretended to be absorbed in her writing. The neglected fire sagged and dropped, and the chill of the spring evening crept into the room. Mrs. King leant her forehead on her wet hand. Then the door opened suddenly.

And it was David.

CHAPTER XI

FALLING SCALES

MANY are the sagas of the sea, but few are those of the merchant seaman. Yet worthy to be sung, surely, is the stately and spacious idyll of the British East India Company: or the daring epoch of world-changing invention when the well-named little "Enterprise" covered herself with glory by reaching Calcutta "in one hundred and thirteen days, partly under sail and partly under steam": the prosperous and unsuspecting years when half the merchant tonnage of the world sailed serene under the British flag: to the most soul-stirring time of all, when undismayed, with that flag still flying, it sailed into the teeth of death and the enemy.

Yet in the library shelves, full of biography and autobiography, one may seek the records of the merchant seaman almost wholly in vain. For these men—whose names

"Are written in chivalry of God
As men who served His purpose,"

who can indeed claim their "place among the knighthood of the sea"—are of all men the most incapable of chanting their own peans. Stout of heart, curt of speech, sound of judgment, your merchant captain will go round the world with no more ado than his neighbour makes about going upstairs: succeeds, with perfect modesty: or fails, without a whine or an explanation: and may be seen, any of these fine days, ending his in his little crib at Lowestoft, with his savings confidently invested in a local bank or a building society, his eye on his telescope, and his heart on the grey tossing waves

which he has proved that "God has poured" around "His world, Not to divide, but to unite, the lands."

Early in the eighteen-thirties, the sale of the great ships of the East India Company had begun. By 1834, twenty-four of their noblest had gone to the hammer, and the trade to the East Indies had been thrown open to many vessels, varying from three hundred and fifty to seven hundred tons register.

The "Pearl" was a fine vessel, some six hundred tons register, with a deadweight capacity of nearly a thousand tons, owned by the goodly firm of shipowners to whom Charles Forrest had apprenticed David King, and who had had their sapient eye upon him ever since. She carried a crew of about fourteen ordinary and able-bodied seamen, besides her captain, two mates, boatswain, carpenter, cook and steward; outward, she carried a general cargo, and was to bring home silks, indigo and dyestuffs.

The merchant captain of the 'thirties was rarely drawn from the class to which King belonged, though indeed the men of the Navy and the Mercantile Marine were far more interchangeable than they are now. But this "old man," skipper, captain, of four and twenty found no disadvantage in being of a higher class than the crew he commanded, since he had also himself personally experienced the lot of every man on board; gave only the orders he had once carried out, and inflicted the punishment wherewith he had himself been punished. The despot who has been once a slave no doubt inclines to temper his depotism with mercy. King had to the full the common weakness of seafaring men—he could not wholly hate his bitterest enemy, nor believe that the most surly, drunken old scoundrel he had ever sailed with was wholly bad. On the other hand, like Nelson, he soon began to find his ship's company, as his ship, the best in the world; knew very well that it is not the men of roughest habits who have the coarsest feelings, and that many highly refined and virtuous persons are altogether incapable of the

unstinting attachment and generosity the seaman will evince towards his mates as a matter of course. The apprentices—though they had, and never lost, a most wholesome awe of him—knew themselves lucky in a master who, both in port and at sea, really fulfilled, in letter as in spirit, his bargain with them, and who, in the days when no exercise aloft was carried out without swearing at the men, managed to dispense with that emphasis.

Yet if, as a skipper, King had none of the "roughness which breedeth hate," he lacked none of "the severity which breedeth fear." Theodora would have been not a little startled to see in the man, whose quiet good-temper she had construed as weakness, a stern power to lead and command, of rapid decision carried immediately to action, of a cool determination in emergency—and never a trace of that yielding softness, nowhere more despised and despicable than in the "old man" at sea.

The "Pearl" was a smart craft and a good sailer, and once free from the engrossing business of arranging for the cargo and deciding questions of freight, seeing to invoices, bills of lading and exchange—the thousand and one engrossing occupations of the commander in port—King had time and chance to prove himself the fine seaman he had modestly hoped, but not known, he could be, and the possessor not only of scientific knowledge but of that "instinct" in navigation, more reliable very often than knowledge, and as surely born in a man as a good judgment of character.

Those early days in King's command were not the least happy in his life.

"The romance of the sea is buried in the coal bunkers." Hardly, perhaps—since the iron ship has produced its singer, and MacAndrew his Hymn. But, not the less, the sailing ship was the more human and delicate creature—the graceful dolphin instead of the great leviathan of the deep; and it was not long before the "Pearl" took in the son's heart much the same place as the "Camilla" had taken in his father's;

he was as proud of her as a mother of her first-born—secretly knowing her to have faults, was always perfectly determined (with a twinkle in his eye, but his mouth firm set, all the same) to defend her as faultless against all the world.

Then, too, David was not only on the native element of his race, but on the element he had himself chosen; if there is salt water mixed with the blood of all sailors, he had an extra dose in his veins; and instead of, as is very common, setting out to win the world by talents he did not possess, was doing what he really wanted to do, which is the only way of doing anything well. To have seen him in those days, with his keen, quiet eyes, his leathery, tanned cheeks, his firm and modest self-possession—alert, unhurried, unafraid—was obviously to look on a man getting on with the job set him by nature and God—the man who had found his sure vocation, and so had his house founded on a rock.

The outward voyage was without adventure, save a painful one. The only passenger, a weak and clever boy, sent abroad by his relatives to recover of his drunken habits, or to die of them, chose the second alternative, and flung himself overboard when the "Pearl" was three weeks out. He was one of those soft and amiable creatures, wholly lacking in the character needed to make his brains effective, with whom a man like King was constitutionally out of sympathy. Yet, having tried, at first as a matter of stern duty, to find points in common and to season the boy's mawkish mind with a little good sea salt, King was strangely affected by his death—even reproached himself he had not foreseen and so prevented it—and ever after kept faith with his memory by a rigid silence as to his history.

For the rest, the commander of the "Pearl"—"under God" responsible for his ship and his men to his owners, and to no other creature—did what he had been sent to do, and did that only. It is of course the picturesque freebooters who make romance; the honest men, like the happy nations, usually have little history. The "Pearl" lay at Bombay for

about six weeks, and having discharged her cargo, re-loaded with silk, indigo, dyestuffs, jute and seeds. If the glamour of the East touched David's soul, it never found expression on his lips. The longing to re-create for others—always present to writer and artist—was not his in the least. Yet the new scenes and experiences of his command made him wise with the slow wisdom of the men of his trade, which is the very antithesis of the quick and restless cleverness which must always be calling attention to itself and giving proofs of its sagacity. David's remained for ever of that kind which could, and did, sit silent when voluble and positive persons described to him, incorrectly, men and situations they had never seen and which he knew—by heart.

On the homeward voyage the "Pearl" touched at St. Helena for water, and King hired a horse and rode out to Longwood.

No Briton, however unimpressible or deficient in the historic sense, ever stood by that grave on that bleak rock in mid-Atlantic—the grave of a genius and of an unscrupulousness equally marvellous—without emotion. But to us Napoleon Bonaparte is only a figure—though the most dominant and dazzling figure—on the stage of the past; to David he had been a contemporary and a reality, personally and directly accountable for Captain King's dangling sleeve and the great war in which he had fought: even now, the songs and ditties of the seamen on the "Pearl" were full of Nap and Boney: while the grim choice of a prison-house proved, if proof were needed, the awe in which the Great Britain of that day held her captive.

Before the tomb, King stood a few minutes in an unwonted meditation, but when, later, Theodora very naturally asked for a description of the scene, it must be confessed her lover's was most bald and unsatisfying; and once again proved him, if further proof were necessary, to be no artist in words and constitutionally incapable of doing justice to his own emotions.

There is generally time enough at sea, if there is none in port, for the skipper to think of home and friends, for his is the loneliness of the autocrat, who, though he may be, as King certainly was, on friendly terms with his officers, can never enjoy with them the intimacy of equality.

Had he been introspective he might have wondered why Theo filled so little of his mind and his mother and the "Pearl" so much, and might have concluded that it was because he had found love as unrippled as a lake and stood to win his wife without strain or difficulty. Now and again, when he remembered the comfortable fortune which would be hers some day, a cloud fell on his brow—as, a quarter of a century before, moroseness had fallen on the soul of Captain Henry King when he remembered the heiress-ship of Camilla Forrest. For David, like his father, had the stubborn pride that wants to give all and receive nothing; the son, more keenly energetic than the father, liked panting and toiling up the Hill of Difficulty better than the finest view to be obtained, without effort, on the flat. When he found time to think of his engagement he almost found, too, there was nothing to think about. The masterfulness of Theo's character had no terror for his own; it was all settled and planned in his mind that she was to have free scope in her own province, and taken for granted that he was to be absolute master in his own, with the casting vote over both their destinies.

After all, it is only those who are not quite certain of their own determination who must convince the world of it by a truculent front.

The heavy and thundery feeling in the moral atmosphere of the Grey Priory drawing-room on that April evening was unmistakable, even to the merest man; and long before the surprise and greetings, his mother's tearful joy and Theo's explanations of her black frock and her status of visitor, were well begun, King perceived that he had run his ship into a

storm—in a teacup. The art of seeming not to see is an easy and a very useful one, and he was not the fool to look from his mother to his betrothed with any question in his eyes.

Camilla said tremulously, "Oh! Davie dear, and we haven't even a nice fire to welcome you!" as she stopped kissing him and began to dry her eyes; and as he knelt at the hearth and worked vigorously at the bellows, he turned round to answer Theo's questions as to the unexpected quickness of the voyage—outwards and homewards—and spoke of their uniform run of luck in winds and tides, except for a bit of a dusting they had had in the beat up Channel.

It was no surprise to David that his mother should immediately ask anxiously if the sea came over the edges and anyone got wet; his eyes being on the fire, it must have been second sight which made him conscious of the faint disdain at the silliness of this question which appeared on Theo's face.

He said rather quickly, turning to his mother, "Oh, we were all as jolly as sandboys, ma'am!"

When she asked, "Did you have any adventures, dear?" he gave the baldest account of the voyage that human lips ever framed, ending with, "And I think that covers it"; and, the fire now burning cheerfully, got up, stood with his back to it and looked round the room.

"I say!" he exclaimed, "I must go and see old Sue. I don't know why she hasn't come in to see me."

There was a silence. Then Theo, collecting her bonnet and pelisse, looked up and said, with the courage in which she was not lacking, "Susan has left, David. There were some difficulties in the kitchen, and she decided it would be better for her to go."

King looked at her, astonished; then at his mother. "Old Sue gone!" he said. "What for? What's the old duffer thinking about? Why did you let her go, ma'am?"

Mrs. King's delicate face worked nervously, and she looked at Theo before she spoke. "Susan was quite positive about

it," she said, hurriedly. "I was very sorry. She was such a dear old friend. But she was very determined," and Mrs. King looked anxiously at Theo again.

Theo, with her black pelisse on her arm and her bonnet hanging from it by its ribbons, stood very tall and rigid by David's side on the hearth-rug, her half-head advantage in height being fully apparent. "We can discuss it to-morrow," she said, with the air of one who dismisses a trifle. "I really think if we don't go and dress we shall all be late for dinner."

Eliza, at her most vicious, was very likely a *cordon bleu* compared with most of the ship's cooks whose efforts David had accepted with perfect indifference, but he had all his life been accustomed to look on home as a place which was not only by its very nature comfortable, serene and orderly, but where old Sue was, within marked and distinct limitations, as excellent as the chef at the Mansion House might be concluded to be good without limitations at all.

But to-night it was not only that the food was tepid and tasteless: coming home from sea had always been to David like beginning the holidays: and now there was that in the air which rather recalled those depressing occasions when one met again the ink-stained tables, the map-hung walls, the other fellows pretending not to be downhearted, and the beginning of a term. Even Theo—much more gravely beautiful, it seemed to David, than he had known her, with the dead white column of her neck rising out of the dead black of her frock, and that fine careless sweep of her dark hair from her white forehead—did not counteract the uneasiness in the atmosphere, and it required no wizard to discover that Mrs. King was foolishly timid of her visitor, and seemed to have quite renounced the habit of eating.

In the drawing-room, things were more smooth and cheerful, and to King it was in itself a luxury and pleasure to sit at his ease in that charming room, to watch his betrothed, whose every movement had a stately young grace in it, and

to be at home once more. To be sure, there were undoubtedly inconveniences to be tackled to-morrow—but David had spent much of his life levelling rough places, and did not wholly dislike the task.

When presently, at ten, Theo rose and said, with great good sense, "I am sure, David, you will want to talk to your mother," she knew perhaps that she ran no risk in thus leaving her character behind her. David followed her into the dimly-lit hall for a moment to find her candle. Camilla, looking up quickly at him when he came back, fancied that Theo had not had to escape from one of those passionate and straining embraces which, a quarter of a century before, had left David's mother breathless, a little frightened, and most happy.

The morning dawned gay and clear. At breakfast, the young people decided on a long walk in the early afternoon. By ten a.m. David had been into the kitchen and swept the troubled domestic water as clear and as thoroughly as Blake's broom once swept the seas; and old Barnes was soon driving to Maidstone (where Sue was doing for, and quarrelling with, a nephew) with a letter bidding her not be an old stupid and to return at once.

As King and Theo set out for their walk, he briefly told her these facts, adding quietly in his ordinary voice, as if the affair were not of moment, "So we'll let Sue and my mother manage as they used to until we are married. Then my mother thinks they will find a little home somewhere not too far off."

Theo, who was still able to feel that, if she had not been exactly right, she had been, as always, righteous, merely replied, "Certainly!" with dignity, and at once let the subject drop. Not the less, King perceived that she despised his mother, and would be relieved to be rid of her.

They walked on, talking of other things, through a little copse which was a right-of-way through Archibald Forrest's

property. In the keen, thin air was the twittering of young thrushes; the slender larches were budding; and the sound of the cuckoo and the carpet-beater were to be heard in the land, for nature and human nature were both waking from the dreary stagnation of the winter. In the wood, the ground was covered with anemones and primroses, and suddenly, round a corner, came Forrest, emerging, like the primroses, from long hibernation and quite as yellow.

He shook hands, saying with a distressed expression, "The way this village tittle-tattles is terrible! Half an hour after your arrival, your old Barnes had reported it to my Cooper, Cooper brings it straight to my wife's maid, and she to us! No chance of keeping one's affairs to oneself!"

David laughed and said, "Fortunately, I'm not incognito!"

Theo had recent reason to agree warmly with Mr. Forrest that Inglethorpe gossipped a great deal too much.

After inquiries after Mrs. Forrest's health (her husband had a sort of pride in always being able to reply that it was far from satisfactory) he asked, "I suppose you will soon be getting married now?"

It was for King to respond, but he did not. Perhaps the idea, now he came, as it were, alongside of it instead of seeing it as a distant sail on the waters, had something startling in it: and it was only when Theo looked at him and said, "I suppose we shall—before very long," that he answered stoutly there was no reason for waiting.

When they had parted from Forrest, King turned to Theo and said, "It won't be dull for you anyhow when I'm at sea. I shall be leaving you among all your old friends and interests."

She looked up quickly. "Interests!" she exclaimed. "Yes, indeed, I shall have plenty! I have only lately realised how much wants doing in this place. Drink—to put aside everything else—is a burning question. Look at that disgusting old Sowerby, for instance; Mr. Anstruther appears to exert

no sort of influence upon him. I was going to suggest to you that, directly we are married, we should openly exclude all wine and spirits from the Priory, as an example."

King, with just a faint twinkle in his eye, said, "That would be rather flying in the face of Providence, wouldn't it? with such a noble cellar as Uncle Charles left me. I don't think that would do. As to old Sowerby, he's sixty if he's a day. You can't alter people at that age, and I don't know that they can alter themselves."

Theo's shoulders made a faint movement of dissent. But she only said, "Drink, of course, is but one point. Much else is calling out to be done—every inch of my time will be crowded! We laugh at the Methodist Revival meetings, but I should be thankful to be instrumental myself in reviving the moral deadness of *this* place." As King did not answer, she added, "Don't you approve?"

He put his arm through her round and slender one, as he said, "Well, I was only thinking you'll have to leave some of your time for the house and your life at home, won't you? I shall be your job too then, or a part of it, and an uncommon tough one I shall be!"

Theo's arm became somewhat stiff, as she replied in a level voice, "Of course, David, I shall do my duty by you. I am not proposing to neglect it. But, as you may remember, Mrs. Fry is a married woman, and she has reformed the prisons."

King, with that twinkle in his eye again which Theo always disliked (for if a sense of humour means an ability to laugh at oneself as well as at other people, Miss Heywood was deprived of it), remarked that he had in consequence always felt sorry for Mr. Fry and the small Frys: and added that he had meant that, though prisons and temperance societies and other people's cottages were all very well in their place, with a home and children they could only be, as it were, an extra.

On which, after a slight pause spent in search of the most telling rejoinder, Miss Heywood replied, "As some of the

cottages, David, are not other people's but your own, I am afraid I cannot agree you have no responsibility for them!"

Even this palpable hit did not unsettle King's serenity. He said, "One for me! You're certainly right there!" Then, drawing out his watch and showing it to her, he said, "What about going to see some of them now? We have lots of time": and they at once turned their steps in the direction of a lane near the Priory, where about eight or ten of the cottages belonging to it were situated—picturesque enough, with their thatched roofs, their infinitesimal windows, and their blooming little gardens.

As they entered the first gate, Theo, as guide, said *sotto voce*, "These people here *never* come to church. If Mr. Anstruther has had the courage to speak to them about it—which I doubt—they make the excuse of the old man's age. But he is quite young enough to walk about his garden, for I have seen him myself!"

The cottage contained the malingering old gentleman—cross, bleary-eyed and in the later 'seventies—and his granddaughter, a tidy and sensible girl.

They received the visitors without enthusiasm; when King said, to introduce himself, "You're one of my tenants, I think, Mr. Williams?" old Williams said grudgingly, "I was one o' old Forrest's. He *was* a gentleman, *he was*," with an emphasis which implied so deep a reflection on the breeding of David King that he had to admire a fat scarlet geranium in the window to conceal a smile.

The granddaughter, who had been talking to Theo, turned now to King, and said, "If you please, sir, I was always trying to get grandfather to speak to Mr. Charles Forrest and tell him as there's a hole in the roof above grandfather's bed which lets in the rain something terrible, and I'm sure it ought to be seen to." And when King, with the granddaughter preceding him, had crawled up the ladder staircase and inspected the hole, he expressed himself as being strongly of her opinion.

He said to old Williams, "We'll soon have that put right!"

The tenant lifted a very dim, hostile pair of old eyes to the landlord's face. "Ye can let it bide," he said. "Ye can let it bide. I'm not afeared of a bit of weather. If it rains I can put up my umbrelly I suppose, as I've done afore you was born. Why, many a time, as Mr. Forrest rode past this door, 'How do you find yourself, Williams?' says he. 'Very well,' says I; and once, when I was ill, he tells housekeeper to give me a bottle of his port. 'Any complaints?' says he, now and agin. 'None,' says I, and off he rides on his mare, in his white hat. I suppose I could have told him if I wanted my roof messed about with—but I doesn't": and the old mouth shut with a vindictive snap.

Theo said, in the voice one uses to a fractious child, "Still, Mr. Williams, if Mr. King wishes it——"

David added cheerfully, "It'll be a lot better for your rheumatics to sleep in a dry room": this rousing old Williams to say in reply that he didn't have the rheumatics: he didn't have nothing. (Which, as he had drunk the water from the slimy pond opposite his house all his life, varied by the scarcely less poisonous beverage retailed by the "Tom and Jerry" beerhouse hard by, and had violated every other canon of health, was as wonderful as it was true.)

"Well, Mr. Williams," says King good-temperedly, "we won't bother you more than we can help. But we must mend up that roof a bit."

The granddaughter suggested grandfather ought to be grateful and say Thank you; and Mr. Williams certainly growled something which did not sound at all like it, in his throat.

When they were in the lane again, King laughed and said, "I liked that old boy. Plenty of character."

Theo replied firmly she considered him a most godless old creature: then added, "I don't know that you are called upon to repair those people's cottages if they don't want them repaired. At least, if you are, Mr Charles Forrest must

have been immensely to blame and culpably selfish and negligent of his duties." And she looked up at David as one who has scored a point.

She had certainly touched him on a vulnerable one.

He turned to her with something she had not seen before in his blue eyes. "Well," he said, "Theo, I personally owe Uncle Charles everything. But for him, I should have been on a stool in an office for life—my mother would have been in poverty—and I should never have seen you. It seems to me that he was one of the most generous and kind-hearted of men; and if he didn't rebuild his cottages, he lived up to his own lights—as I've got to live up to mine."

It was the decision with which the words were spoken, rather than the words themselves, that revealed to Theo she had—for the moment—gone far enough. She threw David a sharp glance from the shelter of her bonnet, and preserved a judicious silence.

The next cottage, despite its picturesque thatch and flowery garden, was damp and filthy, with a mud floor and crazy and discoloured walls, while the wan and meagre mother of a too numerous family seemed to King to blend a good deal of cunning with her servility. It seemed to him also that Theo was prepared not to see the first quality for the sake of the second.

The next few dwellings were what the dwellings of the agricultural labourer commonly were in the Southern Counties and "the England of poor laws, game laws, corn laws, tithes and slavery." That is to say, the Enclosure Acts having deprived him of his old privilege of cultivating his garden and keeping his cow on common land, the labourer subsisted solely on his starvation wages and habitually under conditions which violated every rule of health and of decency.

As few people trouble themselves uncommonly about what they commonly see, and cease to be shocked at what they often hear, the condition of his tenants did not shock King

as it would shock far less soft-hearted people now. While, in Theo, a cool one was among her best assets as a philanthropist: for that "the suppressor should be gratified in finding his vice" is better than that he should turn from it, hurt and horrified. It was certainly with that faint air of triumph King had noticed before, or perhaps rather of being triumphantly right, that, as they at last turned their steps toward the Priory, she said, "Well, there really is scope for my schemes for moral improvement there, isn't there?"

He answered slowly, "I'm afraid there is first of all a lot of scope for physical improvement. All those cottages want repairing—if not rebuilding entirely."

Theo did not answer at once. Then she said, "But giving people new houses will not change their dispositions and make them virtuous and respectable!"

"I don't know about that!" King replied. "I don't see how they *can* be virtuous and respectable as they are now. Anyhow, I'm sure I ought to put things decent—and give them a chance. It's impossible, of course, to live on such wages as old Archibald gives them—but as they are his men, I suppose that's on *his* conscience."

As King spoke, he saw there was something in this speech which gave umbrage to his companion.

"I don't approve of that idea of overpaying the poor," she said quickly. "Mr. Anstruther insists on giving his men far too much! As if people were made morally better by having more money! In many cases higher wages would simply mean more money spent at the beerhouse and would make some of the people very uppish and disrespectful."

King looked at the lovely, intelligent face in the shelter of its bonnet with a smile. "I did not take to drink when my wages were raised!" he said, and then taking her hand, which hung slim and bare at her side with his engagement ring shining on it, he added, "Though I believe you think I am a bit uppish and disrespectful sometimes!"

Theo, smiling very faintly, withdrew her hand as a pro-

test against these pleasantries. "Of course, *you* are entirely different," she said. "You are educated!" And when King said, "There's the rub! I expect they ought to be educated too!" she was fully roused, and replied quickly, "That is not at all the opinion of the farmers and landowners about here! They prefer the men ignorant—directly they begin to learn anything, they get dissatisfied and actually begin to make terms, or to try to! Education would take them quite out of their place. They want helping of course; and to be led and guided to do right."

The temptation to reply that it might be better to lead and guide them to guide themselves, which did occur to King, he resisted. He saw Theo was really vexed. With that imperturbable good humour she had once fancied covered weakness, he said, "Well, I shall sleep easier when the cottages are rebuilt—so I must try and do what I can in my way. I don't doubt, ma'am, you do a lot of good in yours. I'm sure there are none of us, rich or poor, who would not be the better for knowing you."

The compliment was at once so handsome and, Theo felt, so just, that she succumbed to it. When, for the second time, King took her hand in his broad, strong one, she did not draw it away. Until they reached the house she was more of the young woman in love (or at any rate the young woman about to be married) than she had been for days. If she had not been too self-absorbed to be keenly observant of others, she would have noticed that King himself was more than usually silent, and seemed preoccupied.

By three o'clock that afternoon Susan was once more firmly established in the Priory kitchen: an hour later, to it and her comes David, her master. Susan, having wiped her eyes with a large blue check pocket-handkerchief, clapped David on the back and, to cover an emotion and embarrassment, said, "You've growed again, Master Davie, and filled out—

that you have." Then, indicating the pots and pans, "The way that Liza's left my kitchen's something cruel!"

"Then you shouldn't have left it yourself, Sue," says David.

Nursling as he had been—nay, was, for that is a character one keeps to the nurse for ever—there was that about King, as there had been about that dour man, his father, which made it impossible to take liberties with him. So Susan, not more used to verbal than to physical gymnastics, managed to account for her desertion without mentioning the name of its real cause.

When David said, "My mother will give you the orders as usual till I'm married, and then she wants you to go and live with her," she wiped her eyes again saying, "I shan't never leave her, Master Davie: you can take my word for it. You wouldn't believe now this was one of the *new* frying-pans, would you?" To which King made manlike answer, "Hang it all, Sue! Get yourself as many new ones as you want."

Nobody tactlessly alluded to the vast improvement that took place in the dinner that evening. Without a word, and with a dignity most respectable, Miss Heywood had already resumed her seat at the side of the table: and when King looked round the great *épergne*, on which Susan had built up a certain trifle his youthful soul had loved, to take wine with his mother, her face, though still a little nervous and anxious, was happier.

After dinner, Mrs. King having gone to chat with Susan, Theo stayed in the dining-room with David while he sipped his glass of Uncle Charles' famous Solera Marsala, which his mother had persuaded him to bring from the cellar in honour of his return: Theo, who never preached what she did not practice, taking water only—and neither talking much.

When they went into the drawing-room for tea, a note addressed to Miss Heywood was supporting itself against the glass shade which covered the Dresden china clock.

Camilla, from the tea table, explained that it had been left at Beech House by mistake earlier in the day, and that a maid had just brought it to the Priory.

Having asked permission to read it in the coldly polite voice in which she now always addressed Mrs. King, Theodora stood with the crossed sheets in one hand, and the other loosely holding the long scarf she wore, with, as usual, that untidiness which in youth and beauty *does* sometimes "more bewitch . . . than when art Is too precise in every part." It slipped off her graceful shoulders to her feet, as she said, looking up, "After all, mama is coming home next Friday, and of course will want me back at Beech House. *I am* so sorry, Mrs. King!"

And David stooped to pick up the scarf lest his mother should see his face, for he knew that mother-love breeds mother-wit, and that he was glad.

CHAPTER XII

ROCHESTER

MANKIND is the happier for having been happy"; and Sarah Burchell was right when she told Nancy that Mrs. Heywood, like many others, having had much in life, could live for the rest of it on those rich stores. Then, too, she was serenely constituted by nature to believe in a benevolent Deity, not an angry Fate, and on the present occasion—though had her John been able to see into her heart he would have been satisfied it truly loved and mourned him—she had not found it impossible to take an interest in the household of dearest Emma, her sister, nor in dearest Emma's weak addiction to an Evangelical clergyman, who, dearest Betsy believed (and did not hesitate to say), was looking for a substantial recollection in Emma's Will.

This candour bred a slight but stimulating little quarrel between the widowed sisters: when Mrs. Heywood heard that David King had returned, she instantly decided to return herself, on the honest excuse of Mrs. King being a sadly lax chaperone and of Theo's need of wedding garments and culinary instruction; so that poor Theo found herself at once deep, so to speak, in pickles and pelerines.

It was David's attitude towards them which more than ever convinced his betrothed that she was superior and that he was not: for when, calling at Beech House a few mornings later, Mrs. Heywood insisted on showing him a new frock and bonnet, he obviously found Madam's eager pleasure and interest in Mademoiselle's finery a charming thing: tried to be as intelligent as possible concerning a blonde lace

shawl which Mrs. Heywood had worn at her own wedding and which was to be re-fashioned for Theo's: and regretted that his betrothed should think it necessary, when her mother insisted on her trying on the headgear, to be as lofty and indifferent as a young woman crushing the customers in a milliner's shop.

On his way back, when he was about half-way down the hill to the Priory, he encountered Miss Burchell, reluctantly exercising Nancy's puppy, Ralph.

She looked King up and down rather sharply. "Well, young man!" she said, "what's the matter with you? You look uncommonly serious. I was just going to see Theo and propose to her that my cousin should drive you two, with me to play propriety, into Rochester to-morrow to dine and spend the day. Richard has business in the city—and I'll promise to lose you as soon as you like. There's an old bookshop near the Cathedral which I've my mind on."

David was not himself sure whether or no he desired to accept this invitation: it was Sarah Burchell who was sure. When she entered the rectory garden a few minutes later she met Anstruther, leaving it. As he turned and walked with her—his hands behind his back, in an attitude very familiar to her—she said, "Well, they've accepted your invitation for to-morrow."

"Yours, Sarah, not mine," put in Anstruther.

"But one of 'em doesn't want to come," Miss Burchell continued, ignoring the interruption.

"Well, he needn't. If your theory is that they aren't suited, let 'em drift apart."

Sarah Burchell shook her head. "*My* theory," she said, "is, if you have enough of the young woman's society before marriage, the more likely it is to occur to you that you will have too much after. I own I like that boy: and I don't want to see him mated to a woman whose confounded conscience usurps the whole of her anatomy."

Anstruther stopped suddenly quite short in his walk,

which was a habit he had, and looked his cousin up and down. "*Your* confounded conscience has no unfair share of *your* anatomy anyhow, Sarah," he said. "You're a most unscrupulous woman. I warn you not to attempt to manage destiny. It's like trying to separate a couple of fighting dogs—you get bitten, and the dogs go on quarrelling. Harden your heart, and mind your own business: it's a capital rule of life."

Sarah Burchell merely wagged her shrewd head at him, and immediately changed the subject.

The morrow dawned clear and fine. Anstruther was one of the best whips in the country in a day when that distinction was not a small one. He and his cousin, in a grim bonnet and a thoroughly comfortable old shawl, occupied the box seats of the phaeton: behind them were King, young enough to feel sympathy in his blood with the youth of nature, a new morning and the holiday aspect of the day, and Theo, by design or accident at her handsomest, her mourning modified by a very becoming lilac bonnet, and her beautiful face fresh and glowing. As they bowled along an excellent road between budding hedges, the sun gay and warm above them and the wind cool in their faces, her talent for silence came in not unacceptably to her companion; and certain clouds and cobwebs which had been in his mental atmosphere for some days, dispersed in the light air. After all, not one young woman in a thousand agrees with a mother-in-law, actual or potential; and if Theo wanted to do good in the parish instead of cultivating nerves on the sofa, as did too many "delicate young females" in that day, so much the better!

He who would see the Rochester of the 'thirties had best study the life and writings of Charles Dickens: and he will presently reconstruct for himself that drowsy old city, permeated throughout, said Charles, with the earthly flavour of its Cathedral crypt: a city of cawing rooks and sleepy minor

canons: of but one street worthy so to be called, and of several excellent inns: of quiet and modest shops: of not a few neglected antiquities.

As they drove over the old bridge—that bridge over which came little David Copperfield “footsore and tired,” and on whose balustrade leant Mr. Pickwick “contemplating nature and waiting for breakfast”—Theo pointed out a few objects of interest to David—the old Castle with its roofless towers and massive walls commanding the river; and presently, when they all went to see the Cathedral, was instructive concerning the monument to the founder of Merton College to a degree which roused Sarah Burchell to rash contradiction.

Anstruther, having dived in the pocket of his driving coat for a Guide to the City, just purchased in it, consulted the pages, turned to Theo with, “You’re right, mademoiselle! Now, Sarah, retract!” and presently, when King and Theo had moved away to study the monument to the benefactor of the Six Poor Travellers, she said *sotto voce*, indicating the pair, “Facts are my weak point, I admit; but you will find that judgment of human nature is my strong.”

They dined royally in the pleasant coffee-room of the famous “Bull” inn. Anstruther and his cousin having reached a time of life when lengthy meals are, or were, a pleasure and King and Theo being still at the age when they are entirely a bore, they were glad to be released early in the dessert, Miss Burchell saying, “If you go and explore the Castle, when I’ve done my business in the city I’ll follow you there,” without the slightest intention of doing so: to which Anstruther, knowing her, added, “And if she unluckily misses you, we all meet here at five.”

The afternoon fulfilled the promise of the morning—the sun was brilliant and the air softer. King and Theo climbed the steep path to the Castle, and having duly bribed the custodian to admit them to the ruins, presently sat down on a knoll overlooking the flowing Medway, and, across the water,

to little Strood, nestling in trees, and the smiling fruitful fields of what was then the most delightful of English counties.

Up to now, the young pair had spoken of indifferent and quite unloverlike things: in a minute, King got up to note a small craft coming up the river under full sail; and when he returned, threw himself on the young grass at Theo's side. She was certainly good to watch, as she untied the lilac bonnet-strings and took off the bonnet with her most pronounced air of desiring comfort and despising appearances, and then turning to him with a grave face, said, "David! I have been thinking!"

"Have you?" says King, "I've been just enjoying myself."

The slightness of her smile reproved the frivolity of the reply. "I mean," she said, "that I have been thinking of our walk the other day."

"Oh, as to that," said David—and he stretched out a lean brown hand and began absently to roll and unroll one of the lilac ribbon-strings of the new bonnet as it lay by his side—"I forgot to tell you—I've had those repairs to the cottages put in hand at once, and to-morrow I'm going to ride over to Flaxton, where there's a decent farm that goes with my uncle's property, together with four or five cottages in a pretty bad way, Moor tells me. They must be seen to. Archibald has some houses there too."

"Mr. Forrest, as principal landlord, has, or ought to have immense influence in this place," Theo replied thoughtfully. "I wish you could rouse him to a fuller sense of his duties as regards the parish charities. I have thought of doing so myself several times, but somehow I could never find a favourable opportunity."

"Somehow," says David, looking up into Theo's earnest face with a smile, "I don't think I shall ever find one either. You see he's more than five and twenty years older than I

am, and would think advice—from an interloper—a great impertinence.”

Theo let this evident intention of shirking a plain duty pass for the moment unchallenged. She was looking straight in front of her, seeing nothing but the projects in her own mind. The brief silence was filled with the sounds of the spring day, of the busy life on the river beneath, the hum of the city, and the cool wind stirring in a clump of may trees hard by. King, conscious of these pleasant things, and for the moment of not much else, hardly took in Theo's first few sentences, pronounced very deliberately and in her weightiest voice.

“What I meant,” she said, “was, that I have been very seriously considering our conversation on that day we visited the cottages. I mentioned then that I intended doing a great deal in the parish, and I understood you to imply you had no objection if the work did not prove too engrossing. As I said, I should not dream of neglecting my home duties: but those anyone can do: properly managed, they need take but a very small proportion of my time. The lion's share of it should be, I am quite convinced, given to unselfish ends. It has been very strongly borne in upon me that there is a great work before us both to be done in Inglethorpe, and that we can be a Great Power for Good”—the capitals were in the inflexions of her voice—“if, directly we are married, we set ourselves seriously to improve the conditions of the place. I do not deny that Mr. Anstruther has done something. But, as I told you, I am afraid his attention has been devoted much too exclusively to physical needs. He listens to all the poor people's grumblings and murmurings—saying, ‘Poor things! poor things!’ with his eyes on the ground (here Theo imitated Anstruther's manner very successfully)—and quite forgets to impress on them the duty of contentment and submission and the fact that Providence has put them in their sphere just as much as it has put us in ours. Some of the village girls are terribly rough and disrespectful! I intend

having a Bible Class for them as well as for domestic servants. And though you do not at present see your way to total abstinence at the Priory, it would be the greatest blessing if we could enforce it on the village, where the drinking among the men at the beershops is terrible. In short, there really is a Wide Field for Effort"—again her voice denoted capitals—"and we shall be in a position, if we live up to it, to exercise a Profound Influence. But, of course, all such reforms require not only time and devotion, but management and organisation, and I feel that my efforts would be much more effectual if you were there to second and support them. So what I propose is—it not being the least necessary that you should earn your livelihood—that you should give up the sea, and that we should both devote ourselves to what, after all, is the noblest object one can have in life—the Good of our Fellow Creatures."

King had in perfection the rare and difficult art of listening in perfect silence to a long harangue replete with sentiments with which he totally disagreed. Even when Theo had finished, he was so slow to reply that she turned, surprised, to look at him to see if he had heard her.

Still rolling and unrolling one of the lilac bonnet-strings, and with that perfect good humour which was so misleading, he said slowly, "I don't agree with you, ma'am. I don't think we *were* put into the world to help our fellow-creatures, but, in the first place, to do our own job, and to do it well. I don't believe in benevolence as a business, except in very rare cases—certainly not for you and me: though I quite believe in helping lame dogs over stiles when you come across them on your day's march. But I am sure I was intended to do my own work; and that Nature, who is a wonderfully sensible old girl after all, has arranged yours for you. If you and I make each other happy and bring up our children and order our household well, we shall be doing more for the world than if we set out to reform it, and I'm sure I've noticed that the people who have most influ-

ence are not the people who try to influence, but who do it unconsciously through their own character and in the course of their own business—like the Duke. (Between 1815 and 1840, Wellington was still *the* Duke to all Britons.) I don't mean that you shouldn't take the classes and get up the temperance societies and clothing clubs—only that they will be—frills on the frock”—he touched hers—“not the frock itself.”

He paused, looked out over the river glancing and dancing beneath them in the clear sunshine, and added—actually as if the suggestion had scarcely needed a reply—“As for my giving up the sea, that's quite out of the question. I like my job—I've a drop of salt water in my blood, like my father had—and I should never be any good at any other. Besides, if I left it to hang about here and be your—secretary, is it?”—he looked up at her and smiled—“(I should make an uncommon bad one, for one thing) you'd very soon come to despise me as I should certainly despise myself.”

If Theo never lost her temper, she could, with a studied self-command, be very angry: and she was very angry now. With great deliberation she moved her bonnet to the other side of her, where David's interfering fingers could not reach it—as if, touching her possessions, he touched her. With her slender hands firmly clasped in her lap and her eyes sternly upon Strood, she replied coldly, “I should not have asked you to relinquish your profession had it been the Navy” (she believed she was speaking the truth) “or one suitable to a man of means and position. But there is nothing to be hoped for from the Merchant Service—I never heard of a merchant captain attaining distinction of any kind; and you would be exchanging a job, as you call it, which old Sowerby could do very nearly as well as yourself, I suppose, for a position which would be as much more distinguished as it would be, whatever you may say, more influential.”

It is not pleasant to the least vain of men, and to him who is most sure of his own vocation, to hear it openly despised: and there was a certain cold-blooded selfishness about Theo's charitable plans which might well chill a warm heart. If David's were hurt, he gave no sign of it.

"Well, there aren't many rewards for merchant seamen certainly," he said, "except if you've served your owners well they are generally ready to give you a chance of serving them again, and the life, hard and rough as it is, is life and gives a man a chance of sometimes showing his metal. Of course, I'd rather have been in the Navy, But it wasn't possible, so the Mercantile Marine was the next best thing: and I hope to serve in it till I'm too old and stupid to serve it well."

He did not look at Theo—as if, since his decision would stand whether it pleased or displeased her, it was no use ascertaining which effect it had.

She was silent for a few minutes—and very still.

Then she said, in a voice not perfectly steady, "And you think it fair you should have your outside work, and your home to return to when you please: and that I should have nothing, or nothing that really counts, except my home?"

He replied at once, "Well, yes, on the whole I do. That, or something very like that, has been the rule of Nature since the Garden of Eden—and it generally seems to have worked pretty well. A single woman, of course, can make a business of what a married woman can only do as an extra."

"No, indeed!" Theo answered quickly. "A single woman has no freedom and independence while she is young—she can do nothing until she is too old to do anything!"

She spoke the truth of her own generation: before the sentence was out of her mouth she knew she had also spoken inadvisedly and laid bare a motive. She looked sharply at King's face, which was quite steady and impassive.

He drew out his watch with, "Hullo! time's getting on!"

then stood up; and, as he handed her scarf and bonnet, said in his ordinary voice, "I know to anyone as clever and enterprising as you are, marriage means sacrifice and surrender: so it's just as well, while there's still time, to see if you think it worth them."

She answered very quickly, "You know I did not mean that, David!" and again looked sharply into his face.

As they strolled down the hill to the city he seemed his usual imperturbable self and talked of indifferent things in his ordinary voice.

It was Theodora's turn to be thoughtful. After all, it was after marriage that, with the perpetual dropping that wears away a stone, women achieved their ends. She had been premature! And, indeed, for one Cleopatra or Delilah or Vivien who ruins a man, there are a dozen honest, affectionate wives who never rest satisfied until, in the name of love or religion or domestic expediency, they have shorn their mates of their virility as Samson was shorn, of their ambition like Antony, and lost them for ever, as Merlin was lost, to "use and name and fame." She was wise enough now to follow his lead and keep wholly off the topic. As he seemed exactly as usual, she was sure she had gauged him.

They were some twenty minutes before time for the rendezvous at the "Bull": and, when Anstruther and Sarah Burchell joined them, were waiting about the busy entrance to the old inn—and so visibly waiting about that, as they approached, Anstruther turned to his cousin with, "Well, is it bored or quarrelling?" and Sarah Burchell, casting a penetrating eye upon the pair, replied judiciously, "An earlier stage, I should say—trying not to quarrel."

That night at the supper, which the two o'clock dinner at Rochester made a necessity, Camilla asked the questions which the maternal creature of her type naturally asks on such occasions. Had David remembered that though the sun was hot the wind was cold, and wrapped up accordingly? Did Theo look handsome? But she always looked handsome!

What was the new bonnet like? When David described it, his mother laughed and said, "Oh, no, dear! it couldn't possibly have been like that!" Was the drive pretty? Very! Was Rochester a nice old place? Yes, and the river most interesting! Had David enjoyed the day? Very much. Was he tired?—he looked quite tired—and, as, instead of the high tazza usually in the centre of the table, there was only a low bowl of spring flowers and she could easily study his face, David got up with the decanter in his hand to persuade her to a glass of Uncle Charles' Waterloo port.

The next day he rode, on the old mare, to Flaxton and inspected the dilapidated cottages. Returning in the afternoon, riding slowly, about three miles from Inglethorpe on the London Road, he beheld, first, an agitated crowd of persons, and then, with its hind wheel off, overturned in the ditch, the London coach, the "Commodore," and, by its side (with his red face uncommonly rueful) the famous old whip and wit, Cholmeley.

The persuasion that the slower means of locomotion were, because slower, safer, is, of course, fallacious; the percentage of accidents on the coach-road being ten times greater than that on the railroad: to be pitched with a dozen companions head-over-heels into a beanfield, or to sink through the crust of a gravel-pit by the roadside, were experiences not uncommon to the stage-coacher, while the risks incident on the stage-coachman being partially or entirely intoxicated when in discharge of his duty, had to be run by his passengers, very frequently indeed.

One dear old clergyman spent a long life, and neglected all his parochial duties, in devising a scheme for preventing stage-coaches being overturned: but they continued to turn over not the less, sometimes even with a Cholmeley for a driver: and King was not surprised to find, as he drew near the crowd, that the "Commodore" had lost a hind wheel, thrown most of her outside passengers on to the road, with varying results of cuts and bruises, and shaken at least one

of the inside ones—an elderly lady with her corkscrew curls in paper under her bonnet—into violent hysterics.

As King came up, an old gentleman was loudly proclaiming his intention of writing to the "Times" to expose the shameful indignity offered to a personage who had been once member of Parliament for the very division in which he had just found himself upside down. The guard was wiping the blood from his face: Cholmeley was busy with the trembling leader, who had cut his knees: and, by the creature—much hurt at his hurts, and patting him on the neck to reassure him—was a very pretty young figure in a pretty bonnet which David had seen before. He had placed, and recognised her, before he pulled up old Bessie and alighted.

He said, "Aren't you Miss Legard?" And, taking a long look at him, she answered, "Aren't you Mr. King?"

Then she described the accident so far as she had seen it from the body of the coach, which she had shared with the weeping spinster; and resuming her comforting patting of the leader's neck, turned her head to add, "The coachman says this poor thing is more frightened than hurt; but it really *feels* worse to be frightened: *do* make him realise he's quite safe, Mr. King!"

In the foolish habit—now a common one—of attributing to animals all the sentiments, sufferings and affections with which humanity is unfortunately endowed, Nancy Legard was deeply confirmed: if Sarah Burchell had not been a strong-minded woman, Ferry Cottage would have been a free hospital, not only for Lavinia the kitten and Ralph the mongrel, but for any species of creature whom Nancy's soft heart and lively imagination chose to fancy was ill-treated by Fate or its master; and she not only vicariously suffered, as Miss Burchell had pointed out to her, for many human beings long after they were themselves consoled and cured, but for a perfect menagerie of animals who had, in fact, never suffered at all in the manner or to the degree she insisted on supposing.

King only succeeded now in getting her away from the leader by the argument that animals, like children, suffer more if too much attention is directed to their sufferings. Nancy said, dubiously, "Do you *really* think so, Mr. King?" and, catching his eye, laughed a little, and, almost before she knew the arrangement had been made, found herself mounted on old Bessie, King leading her and carrying in his hand the light portmanteau which he had rescued from the coach, and which constituted Nancy's luggage.

They had soon left coach, horses and passengers behind. The road before them lay white and empty in the sunshine: the sky above was blue, flecked with fleeting clouds: the hedges on either side in green leaf, not yet dusty and tired. King had so perfectly the gift of silence that Nancy, sitting lightly on Bessie, had a long leisure to observe him.

Presently she asked, "Is Theo quite well? She's been dreadfully bad about writing to me!"

King replied that she was very well indeed.

Nancy, who had taken off her glove to pat Bessie's neck more conveniently, said with a sigh, "Theo's one of the people who is always well, I think, and always handsome. She comes down to breakfast handsome, and stays so all day long, and is never tired or dull, and always looks perfectly good-looking in whatever clothes Mrs. Heywood chooses for her! I envy her so, Mr. King, that I am very nearly jealous of her sometimes; and poor old Sal is quite—for me, you know."

David inquired if poor old Sal were Miss Burchell; adding that he had seen her exercising Ralph with great conscientiousness.

Nancy, still considering her companion from her position of vantage, was not to be led into a sidetrack even by Ralph. Pulling Bessie's mane through her fingers, she said thoughtfully, "And Theo's so clever, too, and so high-principled!" As David only assented without continuing the subject, she added, "She was so busy all the winter with classes and

parish-visiting and all sorts of good works. I am never with her, Mr. King, without being conscious how greatly inferior I am to her in all ways—mentally, morally and physically.”

“What a very unpleasant feeling!” says David King; and he laughed and looked up into the charming and glowing face under the French bonnet.

After that, for a while they went on in silence—at Bessie’s leisurely pace; and Nancy looked down meditatively on the head of the stalwart figure, with its brown hand on Bessie’s bridle, of Theo’s lover, who did not wish to talk about Theo.

After a while he said, “My mother will be delighted you are home again. You were so kind in going to see her in the winter.”

“Not kind!” Nancy answered quickly. “I quite love Mrs. King. We used to get out the maps and try and make out where you were. She missed you dreadfully, and told me lots about you when you were little. Did you have a successful voyage, Mr. King?”

Somehow, he never knew quite how, in a few minutes David found himself telling her more about that voyage and the “Pearl” than he had ever expected to tell anybody: found too, as with his mother, that an ignorance of nautical terms and a slight haziness as to geography did not prevent an understanding sympathy with his way of life and his love of it: found, too, an intelligence not only quicker but sounder than his mother’s: and suspected a heart, not indeed more tender than Camilla’s, but deeper and wider.

The cottage roofs of Inglethorpe and the grey smoke of the little chimneys, set in their bowers of almond and apple blossom, came only too soon. A silence fell between the pair: and was only broken, as they neared Ferry Cottage, by Ralph bursting out of it and recognising his mistress with such ebullitions of delight that Miss Burchell (who presently

appeared), King and Nancy, could not hear themselves speak.

When Nancy had finally led Ralph away, King explained the situation. Nancy returning, Sarah Burchell looked at her and said, "Well, here's an adventure!" Then, "Have you quieted that noisy beast?" And Nancy pointed out—which is indeed incontrovertibly true—that very few human friends are so delighted to see one as so to exhaust themselves with joyful emotion that they need reviving with draughts of cold water.

Sarah Burchell commented, "Nancy, you're an idiot!": put her arm into her niece's; as they stood thus, added, "You must come and dine with us one afternoon, Mr. King": and, as a second thought, "We'll ask Theo to meet you."

As King rode away on Bessie, at the bend of the road he turned his head, and at the little white gate of Ferry Cottage, Sarah Burchell and Nancy still stood watching him.

That evening, King dined with Moor. Just as the wine had been put on the table, Moor received a summons to a patient living some five miles away—a hypochondriacal old lady always demanding medical attention at inconvenient moments. Moor's curses were not loud but deep. He adjured his visitor to finish the bottle alone: King sat an hour over his modest glass or two; then got a book from Moor's untidy and well-stocked shelves, bethinking him what a clever fellow his host was; presently pushed the volume aside, rose, and opened the long window which led on to the untidy garden and the river.

In a few minutes there fell on his ears the soft tones of an old spinet: and of a girl's voice, round and young.

He listened a minute, then went into the garden; quietly unlatched the gate which divided it from Miss Burchell's and, treading very softly and cautiously down a grass path, took up his station by a group of lilacs under the parlour window of Ferry Cottage.

That window, too, had been opened, and the curtains were

still undrawn. A glow of candle and fire-light shone from the room, into which David could not see. It seemed that Nancy had been trying over the bars of a song which did not please her: anyhow, for some reason, she did not continue it; and there was a brief silence. Then King heard Miss Burchell make some remark, and Nancy answer briefly; and suddenly, into the mellow darkness of the night, there poured, to the familiar and spirited setting, Hector Macneill's song:

“I love nae a laddie but one,
He loves nae a lassie but me:
He's willin' to mak' me his ain,
An' his ain I am willin' to be.
He coft me a rokelay of blue
An' a pair of mittens o' green:
The price was a kiss o' my mou',
An' I paid him the debt yestreen.”

King was certainly no critic of music, and as for poetry, was not only unpoetic himself, but suspicious of poetry in others. But to-night they opened a door; and he looked for the first time with the eyes of a man into a world he had seen with the unconscious eyes of a child when he had played about the little upper room, and his parents had sat, hand-in-hand, watching him before the fire. All his life, the scent of lilac brought back to him Nancy's voice and Hector Macneill's song; the home lights of an uncurtained room shining into the darkness; the patter of a little soft rain on the leaves; damp earth, and the sweet smell of it.

Nancy sang all five verses through to the end.

Then Miss Burchell came to the window, looked out, and stood for a moment on the little balcony—an elderly, stout and most unromantic Juliet—peering down sharply into the garden. King, obliterating himself into the bushes, felt like a criminal avoiding justice. There was certainly no reason that he had then defined, why, instead of hiding and making himself damp and ridiculous, he should not have proclaimed his whereabouts, explained it, and asked to come in. In a couple of minutes, Miss Burchell closed the win-

dow and drew the curtains with a decided hand; and King, not without a smile at himself, crept back by the grass path to Moor's house, and sat waiting his host for an hour or more with some of the words of the song still lilting in his head:

“Let ithers brag weel o’ their gear,
 Their land an’ their lordly degree;
 I care na for aught but my dear,
 For he’s ilka thing lordly to me.
 His words are sae sugar’d, sae sweet,
 His sense drives ilk fear far awa’;
 I listen, puir fool, an’ I greet,
 “et how sweet are the tears as they fa’.”

The next morning, Sarah Burchell, who took it to be her duty to pay occasional surprise visits to Moor's Mary-Ann to see what she was doing (and “tell her she mustn’t”), encountered her master on his doorstep.

“What were you prowling about my garden for last night?” she inquired, eying him. “Robbing my poor little hen-roost?”

“Devil a bit!” replied Moor, with the smile that made his ugliness so pleasant. “You’re quite out of it, ma’am! Last night old mother Simonds sent for me all the way to Padstone—and I had to leave King, who was dining with me, for the best part of the evening. So you can’t accuse me of making off with your chickens.”

Sarah Burchell was for a second thoughtful. “Well, I’m very glad to have my human chick home again—I know that,” she said. “And though there are few things in life duller than an aunt, I think she’s glad to come.” She nodded curtly to Moor, added, “I shall be surprised if that girl of yours has done any of the scrubblings I set her to”: and went within to see.

The promised dinner at Ferry Cottage was only a *partie carrée*: indeed, the little dining-parlour would not accommodate more than four persons, or five at a pinch. In the dinner, Miss Burchell observed her usual sound rule of ex-

cellent simplicity: while the wine was from the cellar of the parent who had supposed it much more important to fill his bins than to endow his daughters.

King exercised his really remarkable talent for listening to other people's projects and saying nothing about his own, which is probably one of the most endearing of human traits: Sarah Burchell's keen eyes which detected this attitude. graciously to Nancy's account of her gaities in town as a busy elder listens to the prattle of a child. It was not only Sarah Burchell's keen eyes which detected this attitude. Nancy had plenty of quickness and acumen, and knew Theo quite a thousand times better than Theo could have believed possible. It was Theo, of course, who presently led the conversation to better things; but, like thousands and thousands of clever women, though she assimilated and reproduced other people's ideas with very remarkable aptitude, she was wholly without originality in her own; constantly hit the target but never the bull's-eye: and left it to Nancy's quite inferior little mind—Theo had no more doubt that it was inferior than that Nancy's nose was a less patrician organ than her own—to see and seize the essential, not only, perhaps, in conversation, but in life. Still, conversational honours went as a natural right to Miss Heywood, who could be both keen and witty: and even Sarah Burchell, as hostess, refrained from telling Theo, as guest, that she also had read the current "Quarterly," wherein were certain opinions Theo had just been advancing as her own, and from correcting a literary mis-statement which was only annoying from the air of infallibility with which it was delivered.

Meanwhile, King and Nancy were discovering each other. It is true that King was quite aware that his *fiancée* was far more distinguished looking, and much better dressed: but, all the same, Nancy, in her old muslin, with a black ribbon tying up her bright bunch of curls, had taste and charm, and wholly escaped the rigidity and woodenness which so often

make the good looks of an Englishwoman perfectly unattractive.

The long dinner seemed short. When, after it, Nancy said, "We are not going to leave you in solitude, Mr. King; Peter Moor is coming to drink the port with you," David was aware he was not pleased.

He was conscious of the same sensation when he and Moor came up to the parlour half an hour later, and Moor instantly joined Nancy, who was turning over her music, looking for a song. David, sitting by Theo on the sofa, found himself in the difficult position of listening to her scheme for a night-school and at the same time trying to catch what was said at the spinet.

The low room was as pleasant as ever, with its many books, its white-panelled walls, its Chippendale clock on the mantelpiece, its clean and cheerful hearth, on either side of which Lavinia and Ralph eyed each other unfavourably from their respective baskets—waiting only for Nancy's complete distraction to come out of them, fight, and enjoy themselves.

Presently Miss Burchell—whose theory it was that though young people may occasionally be good enough to put up with elderly they can never really want them—turned her chair to the fire, put her feet on the fender, and opened a stout volume of the memoirs of Saint Simon—keeping a sufficient modicum of her attention to the happenings in the room at the back of her.

The egoist, with his eternal talk of self, is a sad bore indeed: but the altruist, with his eternal schemes for other people, sometimes runs him close.

King soon found himself answering, "Yes," "No" and "Very likely," considerably at random: then was aware that his eyes as well as his mind wandered to the spinet—that he resented a certain compassionate softness in Nancy's bent face—the mother spirit in her always holding out its arms, to the sore and the sad: and for the first time actually found

himself without toleration for Moor's weakness—the weakness which, in that day, that queen of prigs, Agnes Wickfield, reproved in David Copperfield with the merest, "Oh, Trotwood! Trotwood!" and which prim little spinster ladies like Jane Austen alluded to as "certainly in liquor" and regarded as hardly out of the normal.

Moor was not "certainly in liquor" to-night: only every evening after dinner he saw the world as a pleasanter place than it really and truly is; and himself, perhaps, only needing, as fools say, a good wife to pull him up and make him the man he might be.

King had caught one half of a remark of Nancy's, and was speculating what the other could have been with his eyes on Miss Burchell's carpet, when a sharper note than usual in Theodora's voice recalled him.

He looked up at once with his honest eyes and smile, "I'm sorry! I am afraid I didn't hear what you said!"

Miss Heywood replied quite graciously that she had only been telling him that next Monday she and her mother had to go to town to buy frocks for the trousseau, and that her godfather, Canon Norman, with whom they would be staying, had expressed a hope King would join them for a night or two at his house in Amen Corner.

A certain stolid expression, useful for concealing any, came on to David's face. Being constitutionally unable to fib, he went off at a convenient tangent; said, "Well, the frocks and things are a necessity, I suppose": Theo answered quickly, "As you know, I find them personally most tiresome, but of course I must do as mama wishes": and Nancy, who had caught the last few remarks, turned her head to say with a sigh, "Oh, Theo, I can't imagine anything more enjoyable than wanting heaps of new clothes and having heaps of money to buy them!" To which Theo replying, "I don't know how far one is justified in spending so much on oneself," and the form at the fireplace muttered something that may or may not have been "Fiddle-de-dee!"

The conversation became general. In a few minutes, Moor moved away from the spinet: King rose and went to it, and, standing by Nancy, whose hands were still on the keyboard, said, "If you know a song beginning, 'I love nae a laddie but one,' will you sing it?"

And then Sarah Burchell lifted her sharp nose from her French scandal, and, turning, looked attentively at David King.

CHAPTER XIII

WAKING UP

ON the following Monday, when King had duly packed Mrs. and Miss Heywood into the chaise in which they were to post up to town, he turned homewards without any great access of that flatness which is so often the departing traveller's legacy to his friends.

To be sure, it was only to be a week before he was to see Theo again: but there are lovers silly enough to regard a week as an eternity, and the twopenny postman as a perfectly unsatisfactory bridge from one bereft heart to the other.

Before this, David and his mother had quite settled down to their life—as it had been before Miss Heywood entered it. Under Susan, the house was once more calm and comfortable. Mrs. King enjoyed the sofa with little, or no, justification for the indulgence, and the atmosphere which she found most comfortable. Of an evening, David would read one of the fat volumes from Charles Forrest's library—with his elbows on the table and his hands through his hair, very much as he had read Captain Cook's *Voyages* as a small boy at the Gables: when his mother spoke, closed the volume, not unreadily, finding, as he had always found, the written record tame beside the actual deed, and being satisfied with few books, and seldom. As he sat in Uncle Charles' elbow chair, content and meditative, Camilla watched him, herself silent: for if she had been glib and silly of tongue in her youth, life and love had taught her a more excellent way. Presently, David would get up, quick and energetic, and,

nodding to his mother, go into the garden to one of the jobs always awaiting his head and hands.

Nancy had at once resumed her old habit of coming often to see Mrs. King, and now Theo's régime was over, no longer felt the visits to be a confession of idleness in the visitor and an encouragement of it in the hostess.

On the assumption that her own activities were the only useful and important ones, Theo had suggested before she left (as one conferring, not asking, a favour) that Nancy should replace her in several of them—such, of course, as were not above obviously inferior powers: but Miss Burchell had clinched the matter by replying rather viciously, "Nancy has her own duties here. If I were you, Theo, I should give the village a holiday, and a chance of practising what you have been preaching—and just see if it takes it": a rudeness for which Miss Heywood could not at the moment summon a suitable repartee.

The day following Theo's departure, Miss Burchell and Nancy came to return some books Miss Burchell had borrowed from the Priory book-shelves.

The elders sat indoors: King and Nancy paced a path just outside the windows in the sunshine; then strolled through the fields, vivid as emeralds, to the river, where King's rowing-boat was moored.

He said, "How about a row for half an hour? Would Miss Burchell object?"

"Sal never objects," Nancy said gaily—"At least, she won't so long as you don't drown me—and as you aren't poor old Peter."

King was unmooring the boat, and went on with the task without looking up. But he said, "Why '*poor* old Peter'? I don't know why you should pity a man for being what he makes himself. I should say Moor had better brains, and so better chances, than most of us."

As Nancy stepped into the boat, steadying herself on David's hand, she shook her head meditatively. "Oh, no!"

she said. "Cleverness needs such a lot of wisdom to control it and make it any good! That is what Sal says. If you haven't the character to steady your brains you are worse off than if you had none. Look at Keats: or do I mean Shelley?"

King, still rather glum, replied, "I'm sure I don't know. But I don't see why being clever should be considered a sufficient excuse for neglecting all the opportunities it gives you." And he took the oars and began to pull with determination.

Nancy shook her head at him with a laugh in her eyes. "Well, then, 'old Peter,'" she said. "Not 'poor old Peter.' Or merely 'Peter.' We need not bother about it. Isn't this lovely?" She had taken off her straw bonnet and let the light wind on the river blow through her curls. It was a fair afternoon—calm and quiet. King rowed, and watched her, and said nothing.

The next morning, Miss Burchell and Nancy were busy in the garden of Ferry Cottage when David, passing on his way back from Inglethorpe Place, where he had been to see Forrest on some matter of business, looked over the sweet-briar hedge.

Miss Burchell, who had her old skirt turned up, and her worst bonnet poised rakishly upon her front, nodded at him, saying, "We're watering, as you see—and that's like drink or painting your face—once begin and you can't leave off"; and she seized a large can and went on her way. In two minutes, King had his coat off and was in the kitchen garden doing yeoman's service by Nancy's side.

If you want to know your friends as they really are, and not as they want to seem, work with them; and you will soon find that the *toujours affairé* accomplish little of moment in this world: where work which lasts is almost always done quietly by people who, far from answering the dreadful description of not having a moment in which to turn round, find time even to be leisurely.

King put in a sound hour's hard and careful labour almost without speaking—Nancy at his side being less silent, but not less practical and diligent.

At last, she threw off her pinafore and her gardening gloves, and sank on to a chair on the lawn, saying with a sigh of deep satisfaction, "Now we have earned a holiday!" And King sitting on the grass by her side, they took it.

It was at this juncture that Anstruther came up the narrow path to the house, where he met Miss Burchell.

"Is that prudent?" he said, indicating the pair on the lawn.

Miss Burchell replied, "I am following your own advice, Richard. 'Harden your heart and mind your own business.' 'Don't jog Destiny with your elbow, or it may give you a dig in the ribs you will never forget.' 'Let events take their course'—and there was some simile about interfering with fighting dogs, which escapes me. You were right, of course, as usual: and it's not my business to protect Theo's interests—which I suspect, unless I misread him, are admirably protected by David King's making a perfect fetish fidelity. As to my informing Nancy that I forbid her to fall in love with him—I am not absolutely an idiot."

"As you please," said Anstruther, looking across the lawn again.

Then he added on another note, "So you really are going to be good enough to go and see Emmeline to-morrow?"

When King got back to the Priory, his mother, over the luncheon tray, told him she was just writing a note to ask Nancy to dine with them the next day, as Miss Burchell was not to return from her visit to Mrs. Anstruther till late in the evening.

Used to being the wife of one King and the mother of another, it was no surprise to her that this information should be received without comment.

The well-born young woman never stirred in the evening,

be it ever so long and light, without a maid to guard and guide her footsteps: but, her maid being non-existent, Nancy walked alone, with a blue scarf over her head and a light cloak over her old evening frock, to dine at the Priory, and at ten o'clock proposed to return, equally unattended. Mrs. King—ever a lax chaperon, as Mrs. Heywood had justly divined—was slightly divided in her mind as to whether it was more improper for her guest to be escorted home by David, or to go unescorted: having salved her conscience by a very faint suggestion of Susan, said, "Well, good-bye, dears!" from her sofa in a calm voice, as David and Nancy went off together.

The week had been a week of long, warm days, and of blue nights, full of stars. This evening not a leaf stirred, and a young moon hung low in heaven.

In a few minutes, King broke the silence by saying something—in the few words and with the difficulty with which he always spoke of his own affairs—of the rich beauty and the aromatic scents of the tropic nights of the South: and of that youth who, in those still evenings, sitting on the main hatch, had obliged the ship's company with song.

Nancy looked up at him and said, "I don't believe you told your mother anything of the hard part of your life at sea!"

"Of course I didn't," King answered stoutly. "Why should I distress her?" After glancing down at the face at his side, he added, "The hardness didn't do me any harm, you know."

"If you had been mine," Nancy said, "I should have pictured all the miseries to myself until I couldn't have borne it!"

King looked down at her again with a smile. "There would have been some one at home to brace you up, I hope," he said.

As they neared Ferry Cottage, they saw a light in the parlour window.

Nancy exclaimed, "Sal's back! Do come in for a minute!"

Upstairs, Anstruther was sitting with Miss Burchell—the candles lit and the curtains undrawn. Both had a thoughtful air, as if interrupted in some grave conversation: or perhaps a graver silence. The case of Emmeline Anstruther was indeed one of those which challenge faith—a case bringing constantly to a thinking mind or feeling heart the old, insistent demand of creature to the Creator: "Why? With what end? To what purpose this waste?"

In a minute, Anstruther suggested to his cousin they should walk round the garden. After they had done so once or twice—continuing their conversation and falling silent again—the sound of the spinet and of Nancy's sweet voice fell on their ears. She sang a verse or two of an Irish melody: then paused: played a little, and through the softness of her music she and King talked, but disjointedly; and fell silent again, like their elders in the garden.

After twenty minutes or so, Anstruther shook off mental cobwebs and oppression, and looking up at the lighted window above them, said, "Your visitor seems to be getting on all right without us!"

Miss Burchell stopped dead quite suddenly, raised her voice and called out, "Nancy! you are keeping Mr. King a long time!" and in two minutes, responsive to this plain hint, King came into the garden.

"I am sorry, Miss Burchell!" he said. "I didn't know it was so late."

Looking at him up and down, as his fashion was, Anstruther remarked, "Theo's giving you a long holiday! I hope you're enjoying it!"

King stiffened suddenly—all over his mind, as it were, as well as all over his body. He looked at Anstruther perfectly straight and steady between the eyes.

"Theo has only been away a week," he said, "and I am going up to London to-morrow to join her at Canon Norman's.

That will be my holiday. Good night, sir. Good night, Miss Burchell": and he was gone.

When the sound of his footsteps had died away, Sarah Burchell said, "The young gentleman *won* that round, I think, Richard!"

Anstruther was still so much of the spoilt boy that even in trifles he could hardly bear to be thwarted, and so much of the honest man that he liked honesty and courage, though they were to his own hindrance. He walked up the hill to the rectory, in a wide flood of moonlight, with his hands behind his back and his eyes on the ground—pondering, not only his own problems.

The house Canon Norman occupied in Amen Court, or Corner, by St. Paul's Cathedral in the City of London, still stands, outwardly as grim and grubby, and inwardly, no doubt, as comfortable as it was then. A much more famous canon and preacher occupied it in later times, and—with other changes significant and characteristic—turned what used to be Norman's boot-cupboard into an oratory.

A cathedral close resists the passage of time as do few things in this mutable world. Enter by those great gates—which were not in Norman's day—and you can breathe in with the heavy air of the City something of the spirit of his times: reconstruct a society which included Sydney Smith, Barham of the "Ingoldsby Legends," and Mrs. Hughes, the friend of Walter Scott—to name no others—and was not only lively, witty and accomplished—cultivating hospitality as a fine art—but had a zest in its pleasures, a persuasion of their complete legality, and a *joie de vivre* singularly lacking, surely, in such societies now.

Canon Norman was a very tall man in the later fifties, with a stoop about the shoulders, very handsome, clean-cut features, and an urbane manner of great polish and charm. He was a bachelor: had aristocratic connections: exceedingly ample means: and without neglecting any of his duties—he

had a well-kept and well-filled Wren church hard by the Cathedral, where he delighted his congregation by sermons which would certainly now drive it away—took them with a dignified ease. The Church of those days—least of all perhaps the Cathedral churches—by no means took upon itself to compel the wastrel and the wanderer to come in. “Here I am! Come and find me,” was rather its attitude. Once found, Canon Norman, if not spiritual, had excellent worldly, as well as other-worldly, advice to offer, and was a man, a gentleman and a man of honour.

He had had business relations with John Heywood; had respected his dogged honesty, and liked him: and had very willingly acceded to his request to stand godfather to his little girl, and had borne himself handsomely in the matter of godfatherly presents.

No one, not even a church dignitary of polished address, whose classic and literary allusions Mrs. Heywood never understood or pretended to understand, could resist her pretty old face, her perfect frankness, simplicity and good sense. She took the head of his table, and not only enjoyed his dishes, but mollified even the vinegary aspect of his respectable housekeeper by asking for recipes and sympathising over the failings of servants.

As for Theo, no gallant elderly gentleman could remain immune to the stately handsomeness of her blooming youth: or fail to accord the tribute of surprise and attention to a mind and conversation so superior to the ordinary woman's. The other guests, a Mrs. and Miss Colman-Hope—much better born and bred than the Heywoods, and well-coated in the self-satisfaction which comes from always having been, in their own circle, persons of importance—rashly attempted at first to patronise Theo and her mother; but Mrs. Heywood was so blind to their intentions and so natural and sweet-tempered that they began to love her instead: while Miss Colman-Hope soon had the rare and salutary experience of finding that Theo despised her as the fool she really was,

and Theo's manner towards the mother—an elegant, thin woman, with a bored air and very beautiful clothes—managed, with all due respect, to be that of one who morally and mentally condescends.

At dinner—nearly every evening there was a cheery, informal party of ten or twelve persons round Norman's hospitable board—Miss Heywood several times surprised the company by taking a header into politics—not then considered at all a suitable element for young ladies—and made such a splash (if the simile may be continued) in those deep waters that the cheerful little minor canon who was her neighbour was duly damped; and, later on in the evening, over the port, said ruefully to his host, "A very remarkable young woman that, Norman—very remarkable! She caught me tripping once or twice over the Reform Bill, I can assure you!"

The next night, Sydney Smith, then Canon of St. Paul's and near neighbour of Norman's in Amen Corner, was, with his wife, among the guests.

Many others besides Theodora Heywood—in his own and a later generation—have been misled by the famous Canon's perpetual flow of genial and easy wit, by his bubbling and irresistible sense of humour, to see in one of the wisest and most judicious of men, wit only: have forgotten his active, practical commonsense and his remarkable political acumen and foresight; and, deceived by his joyousness and *bonhomie*, have supposed him the light and indifferent person he pre-eminently was not.

When, the dinner-guests departed, Norman, lighting her bedroom candle for her, said to Theo, "Well, Miss Theo, and how did you like the great Sydney?" Theo (whom indeed the great Sydney had not singled out for any especial notice) said, "Very amusing! But I think lacking in earnestness"; and Canon Norman's eyes faintly twinkled.

He took, indeed, Theo's erudition and philanthropy as amiable poses—sure to be cured by matrimony: and she was

not quite clever enough—or quite simple enough, for the very simple and truthful are not easily deceived—to detect that view under the flattering attention of his manner.

A great part of their time Mrs. Heywood and Theodora spent shopping trousseau and house-linen: and when, just a week after their arrival there, King duly appeared at Amen Corner, something more than usually grave of aspect, Theo was careful to explain to him that her mother's deep and minute interest in the quality of sheets and pillow-cases seemed to her, as did the maternal interest in frocks and bonnets, wholly out of proportion to their real importance.

The two had just left Mrs. Heywood at one of those excellent old shops which St. Paul's Churchyard boasted, and were themselves mounting the steps to the south door of the Cathedral, which they were to explore.

The evening before, Mrs. Heywood had confided to King at dinner that monuments, antiquities, museums, Wren carvings and churches (unless, *bien entendu*, used for purposes of devotion) tired her head, legs, and soul, and that she much preferred the shops; and, going round the Cathedral that morning with Theo as most efficient guide, King himself experienced some of that weariness of mind, which, after all, may originate, as Mrs. Heywood had suspected, in the legs.

The female intelligences which, like Theo's, sop up information as a sponge sops up water, and, unlike the sponge, require no squeeze to part with it again, are certainly many. She had said several times, "This is *most* interesting, David! Here is So-and-so who did so-and-so!" until it became evident to her that King's attention was not on her words, and his eyes were fixed steadily, without seeing it, on the huge mass of marble which commemorates Lord Rodney.

Well able to keep her self-will for the larger issues, and being by no means one of those maddening beings who insist upon having their own way in every foolish trifle, Miss Heywood merely changed the subject.

"By the by, David!" she said, "mama was suggesting this

morning that I should ask Nancy to be my principal bridesmaid."

King's steady nerves and good temper must have been discomposed that day, for he answered immediately and, for a serene person, sharply, "I certainly shouldn't do that!"

Theo asked, "Why not?" a little surprised: added, "You mean the expense of the dress would be an obstacle to her? I believe mama would be perfectly willing to give it."

Poking his stick between the iron bars designed to protect the monument from the touch of the vulgar, King, with a strong irritation wholly foreign to his nature, replied, "Miss Burchell wouldn't be perfectly willing to accept it, though. Why don't you have Miss Clutterbuck?"

"Well, I might, certainly," Theodora replied reasonably, after a pause. "But I thought you liked Nancy?"

Still poking with his stick, and with eyes wholly engaged on that senseless occupation, King replied, "So I do. But I think she's unsuitable."

That evening, having taken Miss Colman-Hope in to dinner, David addressed two remarks to her at the soup, one at the sweet, and a hurried and perfunctory pair at dessert: while her sparkle had no effect on his depression whatsoever.

In the drawing-room presently, when she and her mother were trilling a duet, Canon Norman drew his chair close to the one overflowing with Mrs. Heywood and her best dinner-silk, and said in a low voice, indicating David sitting by Theo on the sofa, "An excellent young man, I am sure, but decidedly a little glum, eh?"

To which Mrs. Heywood replied simply, "Dear John thought very highly of him," which for her, as Canon Norman was aware, settled the matter for all time.

A few days later, when the "excellent young man, decidedly a little glum," was still living up to this character, Amen Corner indulged for the first time in a quiet evening,

and he and his host discussed their after-dinner wine in *tête-à-tête*.

Canon Norman, himself a highly accomplished classical scholar, was surprised at the freshness, firmness and directness of King's judgments (that he was modest and simple he knew already), and would have been still more surprised if, after quite an agreeable hour's talk—in which King's rôle had not been only that of attentive listener—he had guessed how much better his guest had gauged his character than he had gauged his guest's.

After dinner, in the drawing-room, Norman, standing on the hearthrug, thoughtfully stroked his long grey beard as he watched his goddaughter patronising her fiancé.

On the last day of their stay in town, Mrs. Heywood and Theodora were so deeply engaged with a blonde young gentleman in St. Paul's Churchyard, who was selling them glass-cloths and dusters, that King found himself free.

He turned his steps to the docks: strolled about there for an hour or two in that world of masts and riggings, of grinning, swarthy faces and stolid British ones: beheld again the eating-house (surely shrunk in size) where Mr. Gilmour had so self-sacrificingly dined with him: and breathed, or felt he breathed—despite the “very ancient and fish-like smell,” odours of many cargoes, of tar, refuse and dirty water—a clearer, invigorating and a native air.

Presently he took his way to Wapping, where, above a tallow-chandler's shop, old MacCulloch was ending his days.

The erstwhile first mate of the “Princess Amelia” was still a rough, taciturn and by no means rigidly sober person. His one room was not especially clean and not especially dirty: it was crowded with many trophies, of foreign parts and smelt of them and of the wares of the tallow-chandler belowstairs; was excessively stuffy and rather comfortable.

He was pleased to see David, but it would have been easier to him to have taken the “Princess Amelia” round the world than to have said so. King knew, however, by the gleam in

a shrewd, bleary old eye that he was welcome: cleared a chair, which MacCulloch indicated with the very foul old pipe he was sucking; and in answer to his host's "How's yoursel'?" (got out with an effort after a long pause) gave a brief account of his last voyage, in which MacCulloch was careful not to express the interest he felt.

Then King stated briefly that he was about to be married.

MacCulloch changed his pipe from one side of his mouth to another: and did not say, though David saw he meant, "You're a puir fule!"

Presently, when he had refilled his pipe with a shaky hand, he inquired, "She's a leddy?"

King said she was.

His host puffed at his pipe in long silence.

King briefly explained where he lived when ashore, and expressed a hope MacCulloch would come and see him.

The prospective guest snorted scornfully.

"Not me!" he said. "*She* wouldn't like me." And King, remembering that Theo demanded temperance and a respectful address in the lower orders as a *sine qua non*, was aware that MacCulloch spoke the truth.

When King rose to go, he saw by the expression in his host's face that he was sorry for him as for one who had pitched the most valuable of human possessions—liberty—overboard on purpose.

That night King felt better: and slept better in his square loose-box of a bedroom, which, with its high walls and frowning mahoganies, had engendered a strangely heavy and imprisoned sensation: for he knew once more that, if the earth was full of doubts and perplexities, there remained the wide spaces of the sea.

On the morrow, he drove back to Inglethorpe with Mrs. Heywood and Theo.

In the evening, as he and his mother sat by the open window, she told him she had asked Mr. Anstruther, Miss Bur-

chell and Nancy, and, of course, Mrs. Heywood and Theo, to dine on the following evening.

David said, "Very good, ma'am!" cheerfully. But there was something in his face which made his mother look at him questioningly, and yet stilled the question when it rose to her lips.

That Maytime, already tired and sultry in town, was in the Kentish country an exquisite thing. Every wind that stirred brought the perfume of mays and lilacs: on the wide lawn at the Priory a laburnum spread its canopy of gold, and a wistaria, all delicate mauves and young greens, drooped over a rustic bench which had been Charles Forrest's favourite seat, as commanding a wide view of the river and being itself, under its thick trellis of hanging blossoms, private and unseen.

Fortunately, Susan had been brought up by her employers to inflict on them very few courses at dinner: so when the ladies of the little party of seven left the Priory dining-room on the following evening, it was still young. As Anstruther and King were both unusually abstemious, and King—even for him—unusually silent, it was not much older when they came into the drawing-room.

Anstruther at once joined Mrs. King. The man who dislikes the gentle and yielding type she represented was not yet born: perhaps never will be. Mrs. Heywood was quite happy and occupied trying over a new song at the piano: her crooning old voice—purposely kept low till she was sure of herself—made an accompaniment, like running water, to the talk and movement in the room. It was too light yet for candles; but the lawn without, with its great trees, looked dark.

Miss Burchell and Nancy were walking in the garden, and, as they passed the widely opened French windows, one could catch a glimpse of Nancy's slim white frock and pale sash and the outline of Miss Burchell's sturdy stoutness.

Theodora was standing by the mantelpiece when King

joined her, reading a note which the maid had just brought her.

A person who receives (presumably) important communications in the midst of the frivolity of a dinner-party is on a par with the doctor summoned by (presumably) important patients in the midst of Divine Service; and Miss Heywood's manner did not escape the satisfaction perhaps inevitably conveyed by such a distinction.

She lifted her head to say, "Do excuse me, David! It really is too tiresome! There is a case of a poor cripple in the village for which I have enlisted Mr. Clutterbuck's influence with one of the City companies, and he must needs choose this evening to ask me for further particulars—I suppose Laura told him we were dining here. I must write a line in answer, as the matter is urgent": and she turned towards the writing-table.

But King, taking firm hold of her long scarf to detain her, said almost roughly and authoritatively in a tone she did not know, "You are always bothering over some of these things! Send a message and tell old Clutterbuck he must wait. The arrangements will keep all right till the morning. You had much better come into the garden!"

Theo withdrew her scarf from his hand—determined, but not displeased. Moving to the writing-table, she said, "The garden can wait better than my case though, I expect"; as she searched with her eye for paper, wafer and seal, added a little less patiently, "Why don't *you* go into the garden and join Nancy and Miss Burchell?" And, having taken her seat and pushed away with her strong bare arm the trays and nicknacks which littered the escritoire, her quill began to squeak diligently.

But in the garden King found only Nancy: Miss Burchell had returned to the drawing-room.

It is often said of the Heaven of which no man knows anything that it is a state and not a place: of that brief heaven on earth sometimes given to youth and love, it is

certainly true that any setting suffices—a crowded street or a mountain peak—Eden, or the desolation beyond its gates. Yet, still, sometimes Nature seems to abet human nature. The warm silence of a May night—broken only by the faint movement of nesting birds in the trees, and, distantly, by the little lap of a river on its banks—the hundred indivisible scents of flowers and flowering shrubs—may well make opportunity irresistible.

Two or three times David and Nancy walked up and down the path before the drawing-room window—speaking seldom and of trifling things.

Then, with a touch on her arm, King directed her to Charles Forrest's seat under the wistaria: for a second they stood side by side, silent, looking out over the dark, level lawn. And suddenly David's arms closed about her, fierce and strong, and he felt her straining and sobbing breath upon his heart.

CHAPTER XIV

A BID FOR FREEDOM

QUITE early the following morning, at an hour when rightly constituted people do not think of paying calls, even upon a *fiancée*, King walked up to Beech House. As he was proceeding at a brisk and determined pace up the drive, he heard Theo's clear voice saying, "Is that you, David? I am here!" and turned towards a summer-house under a great beech on the lawn.

Summer-houses—now mostly given up to damp, earwigs, and the gardener's derelict tools—were in the early nineteenth century considered as safer for the health than sitting actually out of doors, were much used as a *mise-en-scène* for lovers' vows, and still sometimes richly spoken of as "belvederes."

This morning, Theo, without a hat and in a pink cotton gown admirably becoming to her dark hair and making her look rather like a tall young tiger-lily, was writing, in the midst of many books and papers, at a rustic table a little uncertain on its legs, a fat office ink-bottle bristling with quills being in front of her, and the floor at her feet strewn with literary impedimenta.

There was another chair besides her own, from which King removed a couple of books, and took for himself. He made no allusion to the very *matinale* character of his visit. He was never, here or hereafter, sure whether or no Theo had been expecting it: and suspecting its purpose.

She put down her pen and turned to him with a smile, saying, "I came here because the household is making green

gooseberry jam. And though mama excused me from helping, knowing I was busy, she is a little apt to interrupt if I am at hand—feeling that, with the gooseberries ready, jam-making is *quite* the most important thing in the world!”

If to King’s mind rose the reply that most people think their own business more important than anyone else’s, he did not make it. He looked straight in front of him on to the lawn, where the sunshine lay hot, and, as if he had not heard Miss Heywood’s observation, said suddenly, without preface or circumlocution, “Theo! I have been very much wondering lately if you and I have sufficiently strong feelings for each other to make our marriage a success!”

If Theodora was startled or discomposed, she gave no sign of it. Her long white hand was playing with a quill on the writing-table: and she continued the occupation as she replied calmly:

“I don’t think we either of us believe in violent emotions as an essential to happiness, do we? A calm affection is surely likely to be much more lasting.”

King had a stick in his hand, and began now to dig holes with it in the sandy floor of the summer-house—persisting in those excavations in a manner that might have got on Miss Heywood’s nerves, only she was one of those happy persons who have none.

“That might be all right,” he said, looking up at her for a minute, and looking her full in the face. “If one could guarantee one would never feel anything but a calm affection for anyone else.”

There was a silence—broken only by sounds of the gardeners at work on the other side of the house: and, distantly, of a cart on the road. Replacing the quill on the inkstand, Miss Heywood said, in what Sarah Burchell irreverently called her pulpit voice, “But, after all, there is one’s Duty, David. I know you are a most dutiful person: and, in my degree, I try to be also.”

There was something in this utterance which, at any other

time, would have grated on King's perfect honesty. To-day, he hardly perceived it. He looked at her again, squarely, and made answer, "Duty, unluckily, doesn't prevent your having feelings. The most it can do is to prevent your turning them into action."

"Then, in that case," Miss Heywood returned, very logically, and with that note of triumph in her tone in which all but the wisest of us convict stupidity, "I cannot see that it matters whether one has the feelings or not! The only essential is that one should not give way to them. But I do not think either you or I really believe in the sentimental ecstasies of novels—which I never read myself, though I do not at all condemn those who do."

It was sublime condescension of this kind which turned Sarah Burchell rude and restless. But impatience is for the aggravating trifles of life—not the great issues on which its joy or sorrow depend.

King answered at once—in that tone of quiet determination Theo had already learnt to know, and which she had already purposed to correct—"It is unfortunately not only in books that people have strong feelings, very difficult to control, and which make the happiness or misery of their lives. I don't think your parents or mine were attached to each other—because it was their duty to be so."

Theo laughed—not very naturally; and began putting some of her papers together on the table, as one preparing to make a move.

"I daresay Mrs. King was romantic," she said, "but my parents were really a most matter-of-fact couple—I can't imagine anybody more practical than mama." Then, as King made no answer, she added, in a brisk, rousing voice, as of one who seeks to change a moral atmosphere, "I am not the least afraid of our future, David. Perhaps I conveyed a wrong impression the other day at Rochester, but I really do quite realise that my chief rôle will be that of your wife and châtelaine of the Priory. I shall not fail you; and I

am not in the least afraid you will fail me. I know that I can trust you, and that, having once given them, you will stand by your word and your promise." And, having gathered together her papers, she stood up.

But King was before her. Perhaps it was the darkness of the little summer-house which made his face also seem full of shadows. He met her eyes steadily, without flinching: indeed, Theo's fell first.

Making a feint of still collecting her belongings, she turned again to the table, saying, "Won't you come up to the house and see mama before you go?"

King, looking at his watch, replied, "Not now. I've wasted enough of your time already."

As he walked down the drive, he was aware that he had also wasted his own.

In the little copse, which led through Archibald Forrest's property, and where King and Theodora had met the owner the day after King's return from sea, Nancy Legard was strolling this morning, evidently waiting an arrival, in a cotton frock patterned in faded rosebuds, and with a sun-browned straw bonnet hung by its ribbon on her arm. King came upon her suddenly—looked quickly and penetratingly, right and left, up and down—and for a second held her tightly in his arms.

The philosophers who bemoan the misery of life forget, if they ever knew, how much exquisiteness can be compressed into a moment of it.

When he had released her, and they walked soberly side by side, she said, a little breathlessly, "What did Theo say?"

For a moment, King did not answer. The copse was a lovely place that summer morning, with its pavement of emerald green, and the sun trickling through the branches of slender young trees—a place full at once of shine and shade—fairyland—cool, grateful, delicate. If it had ever been possible to make any mistake about the relative beauty of

Theo and of Nancy, King made none now. He knew quite as well that Theo was immeasurably the better-looking as he knew that it was Nancy, with her irregular soft face and her brown hand slipping itself comfortably into his, whom he wanted for his mate.

Presently he said sombrely, "It was as I thought. Theo doesn't want me to care for her. She wants me to marry her."

"Oh! but that's impossible!" Nancy answered impulsively. "Theo's so proud. She can't want to marry you if she sees you don't want to marry her!"

"But she doesn't mean to see that," says David, cutting at a bush in passing with his stick. "Perhaps she really doesn't see. I couldn't make out."

Nancy's warm hand was in his—an appealing and coaxing thing. "Davie!" she said in a momentous whisper—she had already fallen into his mother's name for him. "Davie! What about telling her exactly the whole truth?"

"That's generally the simplest way," he answered. "But in this case it would be breaking my word all the same, and putting a slight and indignity on her she would be the very person to feel most bitterly. You see, Inglethorpe is Theo's world, and its opinion is everything to her. She has as good as told me—in fact, she has told me—she doesn't want any sentiment"—King smiled slightly—"but she holds me to our bargain, which was not to be in love with her, but to marry her and so give her a chance of working out her benevolent schemes."

"There must be plenty of other people she can marry!" says Nancy. "She's so very good-looking! Surely, there is *somebody*—rich and rather middle-aged, with noble intentions and an interest in politics—who would be delighted to marry her!"

King replied, "Unluckily, I don't seem to see him on our horizon": and they were grave again.

Presently, as they strolled on, Nancy looked round at

the brilliant green of the copse and a small squirrel chasing a brother up a tree, rubbed her cheek against David's rough sleeve, and said in a low voice, "It's so wonderful to have found each other—it almost seems as if that ought to be enough!"

It was only after a pause King answered, "Unfortunately, it won't be." Loosening his hand from hers, he said arrestingly, "Nancy! we must be careful! It won't do to set fools talking—they are always chattering in these confounded little villages—and there would be something uncommonly mean in forcing Theo to do what I gave her every chance of doing this morning—on her own initiative. I can't let a lot of idle old gossips be in a position to humiliate her by telling her I am trying to make her break with me by meeting you!"

Nancy gave her cheek one parting rub against his sleeve—and sighed. Then she said, "What was the day you were to have been married?"

He answered, "I *am* to be married on June 15th."

"Put it off!" Nancy said in a low voice. "Something will happen! Things do really happen sometimes in real life as well as in books. *What* a pity it is girls can't do anything by themselves—I mean, start things and have an independent life! Except for that, Theo doesn't want you—and I do!" She stopped again: then, looking up at King with her bright eyes, she said that Mrs. King was dreadfully disappointed Mr. Gilmour would be in Wales all June, and wouldn't that do as an excuse to put off the wedding till July?

"We might manage that," King said briefly. "Only, we must remember, a reprieve is not a pardon!"

And Nancy replied quickly. "But you haven't a chance of being pardoned if you've been executed first!"

They were nearly out of the copse, though they had walked with the steps of those who love to linger, when Forrest, and Anstruther leading his horse, appeared in it.

Anstruther, who did not love the master of Inglethorpe Place, had purposely flicked him on the raw by asking for a

subscription towards some church repair, and had indulged in a little banter (and the banter of Anstruther in particular, and his generation in general, was without subtlety) at Forrest's manifest reluctance to disburse his money, so that Archibald's temper was something more peevish than usual. Anyhow, he said irritably, indicating the two straight young backs in the distance:

"It's a pity that boy didn't set his affections on your god-daughter. They would have made a thoroughly commonplace pair, and been perfectly happy. That good-looking Miss Heywood ought to have done better for herself!"

"That's the French idea," said Anstruther, "the third, disinterested person is the best arranger of marriages. But I don't know! I don't know!" and he relapsed into silence.

It was a much fluttered mother who met David at the door of the Grey Priory when he returned, an hour or two later, to lunch. For the first time, Miss Heywood had made a morning call at her future home; also for the first time, had evinced an interest in its carpets and curtains and made suggestions—the suggestions of the proprietor—as to new wall papers. Mrs. King had evidently spent a most uncomfortable quarter of an hour, saying all the foolish things she most wished to leave unsaid, and conveying the unfavourable impression we always convey to those who regard us unfavourably. King perceived that his mother was as well aware as he was that Theo's visit had been—and had been intended to be—the signing and sealing of a bargain: the strengthening of a chain.

He left the subject in silence during lunch: when he rose after it to go and work in the garden, he said, in a would-be casual tone, which he had not the faintest hope would deceive his mother, and feeling himself the schemer he never could have been by any impossibility, "By the by, ma'am! I shouldn't like Uncle Gilmour not to be at my wedding. Sup-

pose you write a line to Mrs. Heywood and propose postponing it till the middle of July?"

As the drowning grasp thankfully at a straw, Mrs. King replied in a voice full of relief, "Why, of course, dear! I'll write at once." As she was looking for the small pink stationery which she crossed and re-crossed so mercilessly, it struck her that there was something new about David—something that was not trouble, though his face was grave: rather some new and deep satisfaction beneath the trouble of his soul.

She turned from her davenport with the pen in her hand to ask, "Did you see anyone else this morning, dear, except Theo?"

King said briefly, "Yes, I met Nancy in the copse on the way home."

When he had gone into the garden, Mrs. King sat considering the pink notepaper. Having got as far as "*My dear Mrs. Heywood*" (she underlined so many words in her letters that it came to the same thing as underlining none), she went up to her bedroom, not a little agitated in heart, and tried to wrest from Henry's expression in his miniature what spirited course—if any—he would like her to take. But when David came into the drawing-room in an hour or two, and sank back into Uncle Charles' comfortable, deep chair and took up a book, his face was at once so stern and tired, and he looked so exactly like the father, whom, though his portrait might advise the advisability of giving advice, few had dared to advise, that she did nothing beyond putting a small kiss on the back of his head: and for the rest of the day talked of everything except what she had meant to say.

At Ferry Cottage that evening, Miss Burchell found it necessary several times to be particularly brisk with Nancy, who was always putting down her needlework in her lap, resting her hands upon it—and dreaming.

"You'll never get your finery finished in time for the Clutterbucks' party at that rate," says Sarah, stopping to rub her spectacles, and replacing them.

Nancy replied, "It's no good doing what you don't like, you always do it badly! I'm tired of this ugly old frock"; and she resumed it half-heartedly, still with absent eyes.

"The converse is dangerous, though," replied Miss Burchell. "Always do exactly what you like and it's sure to be successful!"

Presently, Nancy rolled up the distasteful needlework in its muslin cover, took the kitten out of her basket, and leant a meditative chin on the black fur.

When her aunt had turned a page of her book and smoothed it down with her spectacle-case, she asked rousingly, "Did you see anyone out this morning?"

Nancy, staring at nothing, and still rubbing her chin on the kitten, replied, "Only Mrs. Clutterbuck and Mr. King."

"When's the wedding?" asked Sarah Burchell.

Nancy answered, "Oh! not yet. Perhaps in July. Mr. Gilmour can't come in June."

With an eye still on her book, Miss Burchell said, "Mrs. Heywood said something about your being bridesmaid. What do you think?"

As a general rule, Nancy thought a chance of a becoming new frock and bonnet heaven-sent, and not to be missed. Now, with her face almost hidden in the convenient Lavinia, she replied quickly, "Oh! no, Sal, of course not!—when you're always saying we haven't any money for what Cousin Richard calls gewgaws, and you have such a rooted objection to presents!" And she got up, put Lavinia back in the basket, and murmuring something about getting some other needlework, went out of the room.

Left alone, Sarah Burchell, with her book open on her knee, her elbow on the table and her firm chin resting on her hand, sat lost in profound thought. For now, she was sure.

Mrs. King's pink note arrived at Beech House that afternoon just as Mrs. Heywood and Theo were at dessert: and Mrs. Heywood had unconsciously aggravated her daughter by following a time-honoured custom of the house in sending out a fat glass of port to Janet, to reward her for having unusually distinguished herself in her art.

Having imbibed the contents of the missive alternately, as it were, with her wine, Mrs. Heywood said, in her pleasant old voice, "What a pity, Theo! Strawberries will be over!"

Theo, herself not pleased at the suggested postponement, said with rather a cold smile, "Surely, mama, people do not come to a wedding *entirely* for the eating and drinking!"

Mrs. Heywood's eyes clouded a little. "But I do like to have everything *nice*!" she said. Then, her naturally happy disposition getting the better of her again, added, "Still, some of the other fruit will have come on. I shall get the ices from Palmer—Janet will have quite enough to do." Becoming dimly aware that Theo was ill-pleased, she went on, "It is vexing, having to put it off for Mr. Gilmour!"

Which incited Theo to reply, with the philosophy of which she had the spirit to pretend she was mistress even when she was not, "After all, a month or so one way or the other is not of consequence": and she changed the subject.

Once every year, the Archibald Forrests gave what was known as the May party—inviting all Inglethorpe to see the may-trees for which the Place was celebrated, and indoors to a cold collation. Something of Forrest's chilly character and of his wife's spiritlessness seemed to extend itself to their entertainments. Miss Burchell said she had to resist an inclination to speak in whispers and to walk on tiptoe: and that the collation reminded her of the funeral baked meats which did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables of Hamlet's stepfather.

Three days after the postponement of King and Theodora's marriage, Inglethorpe, having met each other in its old clothes

in the village in the morning, met each other in its best clothes wandering about the Place gardens in the afternoon.

Anstruther, as a successful gardener, and Sarah Burchell, as her own, were among the minority really interested in the gardens of other people, and walked about Forrest's together, talking horticulture: until Sarah Burchell suddenly pointed to a quiet seat under the grey stone wall of the moat, saying, "A word with you, Richard!" and they turned their steps to it together.

She did not speak at once. Then said, sharply and suddenly, "Richard! I've incurred a debt for ten pounds—or thereabouts—and I shall be very much obliged if you will pay it for me."

Anstruther looked at her in surprise. "Well, I'm glad you've put that cursed pride of yours in your pocket for once," he answered. "What's it for? Well—I don't want to know—unless you like."

"If you go to the Clutterbucks' dance to-morrow evening—you'll see," replied Miss Burchell oracularly.

Anstruther asked, "Are you going?"

"Not I!" retorted his cousin (as one who means "Catch me!") "I am sending Nancy with Mrs. King and David."

"You're playing a dangerous game there, Sarah," Anstruther replied, lowering his voice. "I've told you so before. It is a pity women can never leave things alone. We hear a deal of the harm that laziness and inaction do in the world, but, from what I see around me, they are not responsible for half the wreckage wrought by the busybodies."

As his cousin was not roused to ire even by being dubbed the busybody she pre-eminently was not, Anstruther looked up at her with his keen eyes, and asked, "How do you know that it's more than a passing fancy on Nancy's part?"

"I don't know *how* I know," Miss Burchell answered, looking straight ahead of her. "But I *do* know—more certainly than if it could be proved like a proposition of Euclid."

Anstruther studied the garden path with absent eyes. It

seemed almost as if he had dropped into reverie on some other subject. But in a minute or two he roused himself, and said, "How about taking her abroad for a time?"

"I thought of that," answered his cousin, "and of asking you for the funds. But, the fact of the matter is, that would be giving up the best chance of happiness she may ever have in this world, and—perhaps this is a two-o'clock-in-the-morning thought—might mean flinging her back on Moor—on the idiotic principle that, as she will be wretched anyhow, she may as well make him happy—as if, being miserable herself, she could make anyone else anything but miserable too! No! that won't do! Besides, it is not only Nancy. David King has a very soft heart under his—inarticulateness. He wants a wife—not the Ten Commandments, on tables of stone. But I regret to say, as I've told you before, I believe him to be one of those unreasonable men who will never take back his word unless it's given him back. So I am going to make it my business to make Theo give it him back—and to undermine his principles—all I can. It's no use *your* disapproving, Richard, for I may as well tell you, you have just provided some of the funds for the campaign!"

Anstruther said, "Oh, I have—have I?" Then, "Take your own way, Sally. But it's no use. If you are right about Nancy—she'll get over it, I suppose—like the rest of us. As for King—and you think fifty times of Nancy, you know, for once you do of him—he did choose his young woman of his own free will, and, say what you like, she is exceedingly conscientious and dutiful."

Miss Burchell retorted grimly, "Righteous—as well as self-righteous! But the self-righteousness rouses all the old Adam in me. Still, I'm ready to bear all her virtues like a lamb, and be influenced for good as if I were one of her cottages, if I can see Nancy—comfortable—with David." And Sarah Burchell rose to her feet: consulted the watch at her capacious waist, exclaimed in a different tone, "We're missing the champagne and ices! What fools we must be!—

a substantial bird in the hand for two very uncertain ones in the bush!"—and they turned their steps to the house.

The old hall at Inglethorpe Place was filled with little tables, and, at them, a gaily dressed company, regaling itself on fruit and wine. The summer sunshine streamed through the old windows: the portraits of Adelaide Forrest's forebears looked on a scene no doubt much more tame and decorous than many of them had shared in that place: Forrest was doing his duty as he understood it—that is, he took his particular grievance of the moment from table to table, lingering longer where he found a kindred spirit in another spoilt child of fortune, who rewarded the over-indulgence of the parent by being always miserable; while Adelaide Forrest—whose insipidity was three parts physical weakness—seemed, in the pale clothes which matched her pale face and hair, to be always fading away into the background.

At one table, Mr. Clutterbuck—very round and genial—was quite enjoying himself with Mrs. King, who, herself pleasantly unconscious of the tallow-chandler's shop at Dartford from which he had risen, made him also unconscious of it: while, at a larger table hard by, Laura Clutterbuck was with King, Nancy and Theo.

It was for this table Sarah Burchell made instantly, Anstruther following her at leisure—stopping here and there to exchange a word with a friend on his way.

True to his resolution, King and Nancy had avoided each other this afternoon with great conscientiousness, King even going so far as to allow Moor to walk with Nancy, while he himself piloted Laura Clutterbuck round the gardens. It is true that he insisted on the unfortunate Laura keeping up with Moor's long strides, so that Moor and Nancy were always in earshot, and Laura, who was "fat and scant of breath," became a perfect peony under the May sunshine and was almost in an apoplexy when they all at last went into the house.

Theodora was the sort of woman who would have been

best suited by the useful and workmanlike clothing which, eighty years later, might have been almost her only garb: but in her day unfortunately the only permissible dress for any occasion was of the typically feminine order—the big chip bonnet with “a veil that swam about it like a cloud,” low necks and bare arms at all suitable and unsuitable seasons, and a pelerine of lace or fur as the only outdoor covering for that *décolletage*. To be handsome in a dress not becoming to one’s own style is a test of good looks indeed. Miss Heywood’s survived it. To-day, in her floating greys and mauves, with her tall figure, her long neck, and features whose regularity the most modish of bonnets could not obscure, she was easily the most striking woman in the room. Anstruther used to say he always knew when Mrs. Heywood was away from home, as her daughter’s clothing was then all ends. But Anstruther did not love Theodora, and was himself as spruce and as well-groomed as his own hunters.

Theo, with her elbows on the table—Mrs. Heywood would have discouraged that laxness also had she been present—was expounding some scheme to Laura and Nancy, while Moor stood with his back against the panelled wall, half listening and half indifferent, and King, presumably not listening at all, was collecting food and drink for the party.

“I really think, you know,” Theodora was saying, “girls in our class do need to keep up their serious reading! One grows dreadfully lax—either one reads nothing—or trash.” (Here Laura Clutterbuck became more than ever like a peony, for Theodora had caught her borrowing a dog’s-eared Minerva Press volume from one of the Clutterbucks’ housemaids, and Laura adored Miss Heywood and was exceedingly afraid of her.) “My idea of the Reading Society would be that we should each study some sensible book—history perhaps, or philosophy—” (if Laura Clutterbuck’s face was hot, she felt her heart and feet here become cold with apprehension), “and then meet to discuss it, or perhaps write an essay on it.”

Anstruther was standing at the back of Miss Heywood.

"You've missed out the most important thing," he said. "You must each subscribe something. Then you must have a secretary and treasurer to muddle away the funds and write a quarterly report to show how thoroughly they've done it. And if you can get together a committee to talk and quarrel, you'll have a Society of a real, genuine type."

Respect for the clergy was once so ingrained in feminine human nature that even Harriet Martineau confessed to having had a "prodigious awe" of them; and it required real moral courage for a young woman even to ignore the rector of her parish.

Theo simply turned to Nancy with, "Will you try and get some of the Dartford girls to join us? I don't mean only those who are readers already—but the frivolous ones who will never read unless under pressure."

Sarah Burchell, who had taken a seat between Laura and Nancy, said curtly, "*That's* no use! You can take a horse to water, but you can't make him drink—even of the Pierian spring—unless he's thirsty!" She stopped suddenly, as if something crossed her mind; added in another tone, "Still, it's a good idea of yours, Theo. There are any number of books at the rectory—I make you free of them: and I have, in a small way, a very good collection myself. I know your mother's away, and that you won't be going to the dance to-morrow evening" (Theo's half-mourning debarred her from dances), "so you had better dine with me *tête-à-tête*, and make your selection."

If Theo's vanity had not constantly neutralised her sharpness, she would certainly have been suspicious of this unwonted graciousness. But she was also trapped into acceptance by the lack of any decent excuse for refusal.

Miss Burchell said, "That's settled then! Six o'clock sharp!" David returned to the table with a collection of good things: Forrest came up to speak to the party; and the conversation changed.

Towards the close of the entertainment, as King was es-

corting Theo towards the house, where the Heywoods' carriage was waiting her at the hall-door, she broke a silence, which had become marked, by saying:

"Mrs. King tells me Mr. Gilmour can manage July 17th, so we will consider that day as settled for our wedding."

David replied slowly, "I suppose so—unless anything intervenes."

Miss Heywood turned her head and looked at him inquiringly.

"I might get a ship and have to go off at once," he answered.

Which suggestion Theo clinched by replying briskly, "In that case we should of course be married quite quietly at once!"

The silence which followed, and presumably gave consent, was so long that even David felt the necessity of breaking it.

Indicating Forrest, who had just passed, he observed, "Old Archibald looks bored, doesn't he? He hates this kind of thing."

It is likely that Miss Heywood was repaying old scores when she answered stiffly (in the weighty voice in which Bacon might have delivered his "Those in great place are thrice servants"), "High social position of course involves social duties!"

When David said, "I suppose you do have to pay for your money, but I think a great many of these parties are quite unnecessary and bore the guests as much as they do the hosts," she was not free from a certain uneasiness: for here once again was evidence of that independence of judgment which had before given her food for thought.

The Beech House barouche—gaily painted yellow, with old Davis ready, as Theo knew by bitter experience, to burst into conversation with anybody at any excuse, filling up the box-seat and overflowing into the footman's (a footman being a useless ornament to which Mrs. Heywood's practical mind could never bring itself) was waiting at the beautiful

carved door of the Place, with the old horses, not pawing the ground as they should have been, but dozing after the last redundant meal.

It was part of Theo's creed to despise pomps and vanities. That she liked to have them to despise was revealed now by a certain magnificence of manner, as King, and then Forrest, who came up in a minute or two, helped her into the barouche and she threw herself back in its spacious roominess and gave the order for "Home!"

King turned away at once: Forrest stood for a minute or two watching the carriage bowl slowly down the drive.

CHAPTER XV

THE MEDDLER

THE next day about five o'clock, as Sarah Burchell was setting her little dinner-table in her parlour in anticipation of her dinner guest, Nancy came flying down the narrow staircase, two steps at a time—much in *déshabillé* and her curly hair all tumbling over her shoulders—administered first a shaking and then a kiss to her aunt, and said breathlessly:

"What a perfectly lovely frock! You wicked old Sal! However are you going to pay for it?"

Miss Burchell, setting straight her cap, which had suffered from Nancy's violence, replied, "It's not the thing to ask questions like that when you have received a present! In point of fact, your cousin Richard is going to pay for it."

"It's from him, then?" says Nancy, doubtfully. "And that lovely petticoat, and the shoes and stockings and the fan—it's too lovely, Sal!"

"No, it's not from him," returned Miss Burchell, resuming her attentions to the table. "It's my idea and my present. He only pays for it. I asked him to."

There was faint perplexity in Nancy's eyes. "Why?" she queried. "Asking's against your principles!"

"But I can throw them overboard sometimes, I'm thankful to say," returned her aunt, arranging the two exquisite old china dessert dishes—part of the service for which the soul of Archibald Forrest had long yearned in vain. "It's humiliating to know oneself the worst-dressed woman in the

room. Sometimes a pretty frock or a new bonnet has changed one's destiny": and she set the wine glasses.

Nancy was silent half a second. "Not my destiny!" she said. Then she put her arm once more round her aunt's sturdy waist, squeezed it tightly, added in her gayest tone, "Anyhow, it's a lovely frock, Sal! and I mean to enjoy it thoroughly. Who made it? *Not* Miss Piper!"—Miss Piper was the village dressmaker—"I can see that in the twinkling of an eye!" And when Miss Burchell named a well-known French *modiste* in London, Nancy quite gasped with awe and delight.

Her aunt said, pushing her away, "Well, go and put it on and don't bother me when I'm busy," and resumed her table-laying.

That Nancy was a much prettier creature when she was dressed by an artist and a Frenchman than when she made her own clothes from the muslin procurable at the village shop, of course goes without saying. The French gown set off her roundness and her youth: the pleasure of feeling her prettiest made her the prettier—gave her cheeks fresh colour and her eyes new brightness: some gravity that had been on her for several days was thrown aside: and as Sarah Burchell watched her as she ran, cloaked and hooded, down the brick-path to dine at the Priory, she muttered to herself as she turned away, "Well, the boy's human, I suppose! And I daresay I'm not the only person who can throw their principles overboard—when it suits!"

Miss Heywood was late: she was generally late for entertainments, and managed very cleverly to convey by her manner as she entered a room in which every one was waiting for her, that she was unpunctual because she had had something better to do and that they were punctual because they had not.

This evening, as she was dining only at Ferry Cottage, only with Miss Burchell, she had rashly decided that her oldest evening garment, donned in a great hurry, would "do."

Sarah Burchell, on the other hand, had made a careful toilette, put on her only ornaments and her party silk—saying to herself as she did so, “One can be ruder in one’s best clothes!” and she nodded significantly at her image in the glass.

It was one of Theo’s principles that she was wholly indifferent to what she had several times annoyed Miss Burchell by alluding to as the “pleasures of the table.” But Sarah Burchell, with a larger knowledge of human nature than her guest, believed in a good and well-cooked dinner as oil to the wheels of life—capital for putting woman, however ethereal, as well as material man, into a good temper: so the soup which she and Nancy had made together in the morning was as hot as it was excellent: and even while she sipped it, Miss Burchell started on the process of making herself agreeable.

Plain, poor and elderly, few women could be more stimulating and amusing than she: she had not only reading, but the wit to use it, or leave it unused—a more difficult art: and where Theo was the mouthpiece of other people’s cleverness—read or remembered—Sarah Burchell had always tested and judged for herself: was not ashamed to be wrong or to own herself so: and clever enough to demand no recognition of her cleverness.

To-night, Theo found the time passing pleasantly: the simple dinner continued as well as it had started: when, at dessert, she refused a glass of port with a virtuous, “Thank you, I *never* take any wine,” her tone was less than usually condemnatory of those who do: and by the time she and her hostess were sitting in the little parlour over their coffee—the window open to the soft air of the summer evening, and a woman from the village (a rare indulgence) washing up in the little kitchen below—even Theo experienced a certain sensation of mellowness—a softening of her usual disapproval of Miss Burchell’s mind and character, and of her own

annoyance at having been trapped into accepting an unwelcome invitation.

Without difficulty, Sarah Burchell, between sips of coffee, led the conversation—*via* the Reading Society—into various other philanthropic schemes: Theo's eyes brightened; she set down her cup, turned to her hostess, and shedding the stiffness and reserve which she generally assumed like an armour whenever Miss Burchell's rapier was within touch, spoke with keen interest and good sense, and was for a few minutes almost entirely natural and free from self-consciousness.

As Hannah More felt equally called upon to tackle the question of Sunday Schools and the French Revolution, to inveigh against the sinfulness of waltzing and of the Slave Trade, to reprove the infidelity of Gibbon and the worldliness of Horace Walpole, and (morally) to pat on the back Dr. Johnson, Garrick and Queen Charlotte, so Theodora Heywood was entirely convinced she had been put into the world to set other people right, and that other people could never have been placed there, so to set her.

This attitude would have ruffled a much more placid disposition than Sarah Burchell's: and Nancy, not at all clever, would have detected now easily, what Theo did not perceive at all—that, as her hostess smoothed a crease thoughtfully from the knee of her silk dress, she was also smoothing creases out of her temper. She let Theo have her say out, and then, putting a suppressing hand on Ralph, who had come nosing up to join in the conversation, she replied:

"All very well and good! I agree with you—people *are* very selfish and supine—perhaps here particularly, as you suggest; but I fancy the complaint is universal, and that Richard Anstruther hasn't anything like such a sharp attack of it as most of his clerical brethren—but it is a fact that so long as one is well-to-do oneself one is very apt to forget the sufferings of other people, and that there is a crying need here for someone who, as you say, will elevate

the moral condition of the poor and devote herself to their service. Only, in my opinion, if you're to be that person, even in our little neighbourhood, you've no business to marry!" and her hand on the head of Ralph, ingratiatingly determined to be noticed, was heavy to painfulness.

Yielding to fate, he lay down at last, and, putting out his long pink tongue, licked a dark patch on her gown.

Miss Heywood's backbone stiffened quite visibly. Her mother's strict training in the duty of respect to elders was certainly effectual as she merely said coldly, "May I ask why, Miss Burchell?"

Sarah Burchell looked straight and fixedly in Theo's eyes. "The reason is," she said, "you will be trying to combine incompatible rôles. You're a clever and enterprising woman, my dear. It isn't as if you would be content, like that dear old mother of yours—who has natural benevolence oozing, I believe, from every pore—just to make and take some soup (when the dining-room and kitchen had been duly considered) to old Mrs. Grabham, and do all sorts of little kindnesses in the village on the strict understanding they never interfered with your father's comfort! No! You want to begin where your mother leaves off! You want to make it the prime object of your life to reform the neighbourhood—to turn rags and filth into tidiness and curtsying, and those poor old gaffers, who put up their feet on the back benches in church of a Sunday morning and go to sleep while my cousin is thumping the dust out of the pulpit cushion in the fervour of his eloquence, into devotees! You want to make the labourers contented on their eight or nine shillings a week (whereas," adds Miss Burchell in a parenthesis and as if to herself, "I should have thought to inspire them with a divine discontent of such payment would have been much more useful); to start clubs and classes; to be a philanthropist on a scale which will be always growing larger; to attain fame (if that isn't too big a word) through philanthropy, and to make it the main business of your existence. And *my*

contention is, that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the only possible career for a married woman is—marriage.”

It had not been displeasing to Theo to find that her cleverness and enterprise had wrung recognition even from Miss Burchell: while, in those days, for a woman to be described as a philanthropist had a most unusual and important sound.

So she said in rather a gratified voice, “No doubt one would have to be on one’s guard against the philanthropies encroaching on one’s home duties; but David and I are agreed it can be done—we talked the matter over that day at Rochester!”

Sarah Burchell looked up sharply at her guest. “Oh! you did, did you?” passed through her mind. “And *that* was why the young gentleman looked so glum!”

Aloud, she advanced another argument. “Well,” she said, “let us suppose you *can* combine the rôles—that you can have a husband, half a dozen children, three or four maids and a fair-sized house, which you will seldom be in but which you will, all the same, contrive to rule to the satisfaction of every one concerned—there still remains the fact that you will have to go, cap in hand, to David King to ask him for a little of your own money to work your schemes—for all schemes want money, as of course you have found out. With due deference to the laws of the noble British constitution, that seems to me to be a humiliating attitude for any woman of spirit. And of course you’re aware, if you get your scheme carried successfully and the accounts come right, it’s always the husband who has done them. If they don’t—well then, he hasn’t! And what is most annoying,” Sarah Burchell added, as if to herself, “is, that that is generally the correct view of the matter. Man is the arithmetical animal.”

Miss Heywood was far too astute again to show her cards as she had shown them to David King at Rochester, and to be led twice into the open admission that she considered her schemes were only possible from the vantage ground of mat-

rimony: but there remained with her the sublime conviction that she was so much cleverer than other people that she need take very little trouble to throw dust in their eyes—even in the eyes of Sarah Burchell.

So she replied with a slight smile, "Certainly a married woman is not quite a free agent, but in my case no difficulties will arise. David has the most honourable scruples as regards my money, and has expressed his wish I should use it exactly as I like. So," and she raised her eyes and calmly met Miss Burchell's penetrating pair, "in my case, my position as a married woman will not be any hindrance to me."

Sarah Burchell was silent. The kitten, who had for some time been sitting with her tail curled round her legs, considering which of the two laps available looked the most comfortable for purposes of repose, here sprang lightly into Theo's; Miss Heywood immediately replacing her in her basket, firmly, but without heat or malice—not that she disliked animals, but in Ferry Cottage felt called upon to register her disapproval of the weakly indulgent way in which Nancy conducted their education.

Then Miss Burchell leant forward, and, with a warmth of manner very rare in her, laid her large and capable hand over Theo's slim one. "Come, Theo!" she said in a voice and with a certain intimacy and affection which Theo did not know. "Come, Theo! you're a good girl. I don't believe you would willingly do an honest man so great a wrong as to marry him simply as a convenience—a stepping-stone to reach your own ends. I'm only an old spinster, but, before you were born, I had some experience of life—and of lives thrown away. I speak of what I know. If you are not absolutely satisfied simply to be David's wife and the mother of his children—to be that first and, if necessary, that only—you have no business to marry him. If you are not satisfied with the humdrum affections, leave them to the commonplace people who are! But don't juggle with Nature—

the old dame stands wonderfully little of that. The life devoted to good works—if you choose—or the married life; but not the married life sacrificed to good works. That won't pay. And how, as a reasonable woman, do you think you will keep your husband's affection but by your own? He's a good man: but I suppose you don't want him bound to you by relentless duty—with his heart, perhaps—somewhere else."

And this time it was Sarah Burchell's eyes which steadily met Theo's.

There was quite a long silence in the little parlour: and even Ralph stopped licking his paws for a minute, as if he were listening.

Then Theo, with a coolness Miss Burchell could but admire, lifted her elegant head from an exaggeratedly calm contemplation of the point of a satin shoe, and said, "It is really very good of you, Miss Burchell, to take so much interest in my and David's affairs; but I can assure you that only the other morning we discussed the nature of our attachment to each other, and came to a satisfactory conclusion. Is that the new 'Quarterly' I see there?" and Miss Heywood stretched out her hand for it.

Sarah Burchell could take defeat like a man and a Briton: was "baffled to fight better"; but she had lost the first round—and owned it.

"It's my cousin Anstruther's copy," she said, "he'll be delighted to lend it to you. But we're forgetting the Reading Society": and she led the way to her well-filled book-case in the alcove by the fireplace, and, rescuing a key from a large pocket in a plain petticoat, opened its glass doors.

For the rest of the evening they discussed literature: and it is not too much to say that Miss Burchell not only admired her guest's energetic and purposeful intelligence, but even felt a sympathy with her ambitions to be some one and do something—to win power, name and distinction with what, after all, was the only weapon at her disposal.

Only once that old Adam in her, which Theo always roused, rose up again, armed.

As they turned from the book-shelf, she said, "I don't know that you will get Nancy to join your Reading Club. She won't lightly run the risk of having to write an essay, and she doesn't care about serious reading."

Whereon, Miss Heywood, looking up from a book in her hand, rejoined, "No! it's a great pity!"

And Sarah Burchell snapped back sharply, "Is it? Why?"—a foolish question, but one for which even Miss Heywood found herself for the moment without an answer.

When Theo had left, Miss Burchell—sitting in the parlour with her book on her knee—forgot to read it.

The summer night waned, and the candles burnt low. Ralph, wondering where Nancy could be, put himself to bed. Then the dawn began to come—clean and cool—almost cold: the first bird twittered: and the candles burnt out. Perhaps Sarah Burchell dozed: when presently she went to the window, shivering a little, it was nearly four o'clock in the morning, and the loveliness of the new day was veiled in grey mist.

Listening, she heard the noise of carriage wheels, sounding loud in the silence. They stopped at the little gate: she saw through the grey veil, two dim figures: as they came down the little path, she drew back into the room. She heard David's voice, but not his words: then Nancy's, in some brief answer. It seemed to her there was quite a long silence before she heard King's firm, quick step on the path and Nancy bolting the door below. Then Nancy came slowly upstairs—not with the joyful run which usually brought her back from the most delightful of all delights—a dance.

As she came in, in the eerie, cold light—her old cloak slipping off the new frock, and her gloves and fan in her hands—her aunt saw that her face was full of some strange softness—as of a dream that feared to be disturbed. In-

stead of settling down, as was her wont after a festivity, to describe its every detail, to-night she said:

"Sal! I'm ever so late! You must be half asleep, and I am sure I am!"

When Miss Burchell asked, "Well, I suppose it was a good dance, as you stayed so late?" Nancy only replied, "*Lovely!* I'll tell you about it to-morrow," and with a quick "Good night" she was gone.

Miss Burchell also went to bed—slowly—with an absent mind and heart.

The next morning, as Sarah Burchell was passing the rectory, she saw, standing at what our grandparents called the "sweep gate," Moor, talking to Anstruther.

Her cousin called to her, "Wasn't it you, Sally, who said nothing ever happened in Inglethorpe? Here's Moor—the hero of a romance!"

Moor looked up with a laugh. "I'm a legatee," he said. "An old cousin of mine in Leicester has died and left me five thousand pounds. I'm going away for a week—it's only decent I should be at the funeral."

"What made him do it?" asked Sarah Burchell grimly.

And Moor replied, "Well, he had never seen me, and he knew all his other relatives personally. Luck, isn't it?"

She offered congratulations briefly.

When Moor was well away, Anstruther turned to her with, "I looked in at the festivities last night! The new frock was very becoming. I didn't see Nancy dancing much: King doesn't dance: and old Clutterbuck had illuminated his garden." Here Anstruther chuckled: then, noticing for the first time that his cousin's face was worn and grey, he said, on another note, "Well, anyhow, Sarah, the wedding's postponed till the middle of July: and unexpected things *do* happen, even in Inglethorpe, you see."

Miss Burchell replied, "But only the wrong things! I suppose even you, Richard, have perceived that now Peter

Moor, instead of merely looking and longing, can proceed to action and is in a position to marry."

Nodding at him, and with a heavier and slower step than usual, she went her way.

It took her this morning to one of the cottages belonging to David King which he and Theo had visited on that spring morning not many weeks before.

Now, several of the dwellings were in the hands of the local builder, and, from bricks, mortar and débris, there issued in a few minutes, David King himself. He explained that the family Miss Burchell sought were staying with relatives in the village. "Until we've done our business here," says King, pointing with his stick.

"Your young woman's let you in for this expense, I suppose?" asked Miss Burchell.

"Not at all!" he answered, always just, and particularly glad to be just to Theo. "On the contrary, I'm the one who thinks better conditions make better people. Theo's for changing the heart—and I'm for improving the body—you can get at it much more easily, for one thing," says David, with a gleam in his grave eyes.

"The old question," murmured Miss Burchell, only half attending to her own words. "Does the pig make the sty, or the sty make the pig?" As King walked on slowly by her side, she said in another tone, "Of course, we are most of us virtuous because virtue is its own reward: and we don't steal chiefly because we don't want to. In our class, however, there is a good deal of over-scrupulousness in many things. There's that nonsense, for instance, about all vows being binding, whereas, if you make them under a misapprehension, you have no right to keep them—especially if the keeping involves unhappiness for innocent people."

And she looked straight in front of her, and, carefully, not at the brown, quiet face at her side.

After a silence, King said, "A very dangerous doctrine!"

"Of course it can be misapplied," Sarah Burchell returned

sharply. "But it's equally dangerous to play Don Quixote in the nineteenth century: and we don't live in a novel, where the third volume is sure to clear up the idiotic blunders of the first and second. A mistake may ruin more lives than one." This time she looked at him steadily.

King said nothing for a minute or two: then, "Are you going through the copse? I'm on my way to Beech House."

At that, Sarah Burchell lost her temper. "I've just seen Peter Moor," she said. "He's come into a handsome legacy, so now we must put him on our list of eligible bachelors." And she turned her stalwart back in its ancient shawl upon David King, and pursued her way to Ferry Cottage alone.

She was angry—and respected him: wanted him to give in—and to be exactly what he was—adamant. He had looked strained and wretched, and her heart was soft for him as it was softer still for Nancy. As she trudged home, she was sore from the wounds she had inflicted.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PETALS OF A ROSE

IT now wanted but four weeks to the wedding.

King had rented for his mother a pretty little cottage, near the church, on Forrest's property—Forrest, who always took what may be described as a dismal pleasure in driving a hard bargain, not having scrupled to state that he let the house (which was out of repair and had long stood empty) at immense sacrifice. As King was one of those unusual persons who realise that the chief good of money is to buy peace with it, he listened to Archibald's arguments in silence, and did the repairs himself, so that Forrest felt the satisfaction of having scored a point, and would have felt more, if he could have determined by the expression of David's face whether he knew he had been worsted, or whether he did not.

Mrs. King, with any thoughts she could spare from David's future, began to take a little interest in the details of her home to be, and to feel she would be as happy there as she could be anywhere, knowing that he was not. She hugged to herself the thought that David would often be able to slip in and see her alone, and, though the consideration was a very secondary one, she also felt it would be pleasant to indulge in what may be called her innocent vices—the half-hour before the lights came, doing nothing, and the privilege of saying foolish things without being made to feel a fool for saying them.

Miss Heywood herself condescended to take a gracious interest in Ivy Chimneys: David never saw, though his mother

did perfectly, that it satisfied Theo's sense of the fitness of things that the Grey Priory had been assigned to herself and so much more modest a nest to Camilla, who had neither presence nor dignity. But if she came more often to the Priory than had been her wont—just to show it would be *her* Priory—she did not come unduly often. As she had said, she could trust King's honour—"trade upon it," Sarah Burchell had muttered under her breath. Also, her time was really full—and made brimful now by the Reading Society, which met twice a week at Beech House and spent most of its *séance* meekly listening while Theo delivered a spirited monologue on Mr. Rogers' "Italy." There was indeed a young lady from Dartford, Miss Meachin, with a small, spry, sprightly mind, who now and again plunged with posers, to which Theo invented answers with great quickness and resource: while there was a calm courage about Nancy's mental attitude which filled Laura Clutterbuck (who was nearly pale with terror lest she should be called on to display intelligence) with a fearful wonder.

When Theo invited the criticism of the assembly at the end of Part I., Nancy said lightly, "Oh! Theo, *I* think it's awfully dull! I don't believe it *can* do us any good! Sal has been in Italy and she says the stupid old creature doesn't give one an idea what it's really like! The woodcuts in our copy are the only part *I* like. I vote we try something else!"

Whereat Miss Heywood, tolerantly, from the little rostrum where she sat as president, "But you, Nancy, are not a reader. The fault, I should say, lies with you rather than with Mr. Rogers!"

And Nancy replied, "I'm not at all sure about *that*!"

After all, posterity is not at all sure either.

For the remainder of the sitting, Nancy made dots absent-mindedly on her blotting paper: or, with her chin in her hand, looked out of the window to the garden, blinking hotly in afternoon sunshine—thinking—not of Mr. Rogers.

Though as careful as they had resolved to be not to give the gossips food for talk, in a little place like Inglethorpe it was practically impossible but that two persons who, like King and Nancy, were always in it—with the summer weather and their own hearts tempting them—should meet constantly.

One morning, it was in the village shop, whither King had come for a pound of nails, and Nancy for a pound of rice. The next, Nancy, taking a note to Inglethorpe Place, happened on David as she took a short cut through the copse. They would both have been more, or less, than human if she had not taken that route again the day following—just in case!—and if David had not happened again to select it as his way to the village. A third day, at the request of her aunt, Nancy ran down to the Priory to borrow a trowel, and it was natural and inevitable that she should walk round the garden with the lender and gardener.

It was now high June, and very fine. The garden was humming with life: the fields full of wild flowers. King was very proud of his roses—in their wide beds on the lawn—not because they were good roses, but because he had grown them and felt agreeably surprised that, under such chaperonage, they had decided to come up at all. Nancy really knew a good deal about rose-growing, and when Mrs. King beheld the pair from the window they were seriously on the subject.

However, not for long.

When they reached the kitchen garden, whose high red walls shut out interlopers, Nancy's hand slipped naturally into David's, and they walked slowly between the currant bushes (bordered with sweet williams, in their bright and vulgar prime) in the perfect companionship which has no need of words. They had never needed many: they had always fitted like parts in a puzzle. King knew that Nancy was as true as a bell—perfectly sound and sweet—with plenty of sense to season the sweetness: with a warm temper, no

doubt, as well as a warm heart: and *for* him, devotedly—if need be, against all the world: while she loved his gravity and steadiness as his mother had loved his father's: ay, and his dourness because she could melt it: and his judgment and determination because she could not melt them. Only fate was against them. Sometimes, they could forget it even now—when the days were falling from June like the petals from a full-blown rose.

Presently, Nancy said coaxingly, looking up into his grave face, "*Don't*, David! It isn't July yet. Something must happen!"

He answered, "Nancy! I've been thinking. After the 17th I shall be at home as little as possible—I mean, when I am not at sea, that I shall find excuses to be often away from here. You must remember always your life is your own—that you must make it as happy as possible—and that there is nothing we have said—or felt—which does not leave you entirely free."

"Nonsense!" says Nancy, in a voice not quite steady.

He took no notice. "Perhaps," he said, "Miss Burchell will take you abroad. Only, don't marry anybody—because he wants to marry you and you are sorry for him. Think of yourself!"

Nancy answered, "I shall! And I have decided I would rather spend the rest of my life thinking of you."

He shook his head. "You're bound to nothing——"

And Nancy, gripping his hand very hard, said, "Don't be an idiot, David! Please don't!" And though he tried to look stern, she saw that he was pleased.

She returned without the trowel, having forgotten all about it, but as Miss Burchell seemed not to notice the omission, it mattered less. Also, it gave King a justification for appearing at Ferry Cottage next day.

The week following, after Mr. Rogers had conducted the young ladies of Inglethorpe and environs to Italy for the fourth time, Nancy stayed to dine at Beech House. Run-

ning home in the evening in the soft dusk, she saw in the quiet lane near Ferry Cottage a familiar figure, and when she reached home half an hour behind time and ran upstairs rather breathless, saying, "Sal! Am I very late?" Miss Burchell, reading, drew out her watch, and turned it to her niece, with, "No! just as usual"—and Nancy saw that the watch was slow.

On the morning of June 24th, Miss Burchell put in a very unusual appearance at the Saints' Day service, which Anstruther persisted in having when most people considered such services simply encouraged emotionalism in religion and the Saints to overestimate their own importance. Except the clerk and the bell-ringer, she formed the entire congregation.

Anstruther, finding her in the churchyard afterwards, standing among the graves and staring absently at the lovely view of river and Kentish country that churchyard affords, said, "Wonders will never cease! I understood you considered week-day services savoured of Puseyism?"

Miss Burchell waived aside this opportunity for controversy, and replied, "I wanted an excuse to get away. David King is in my garden."

Anstruther stood stock still, and shook his head reproachfully at a crazy tombstone. "You're doing Nancy an ill turn!" he exclaimed.

And Sarah Burchell answered, "No!" quite loudly and fiercely. More quietly she added, "Why shouldn't she sip the cup because she may only sip it? She may have nothing but a memory to live on all her life. I shan't deprive her of it."

Before Anstruther could make reply, she had nodded curtly at him, and was gone.

On June 30th, Mrs. King gave a small archery party in one of the pretty fields of the Grey Priory—archery being then a most fashionable pastime—the Royal Kentish Bowmen at Dartford giving most noble and splendid entertain-

ments on Dartford Heath. Mrs. King's was not at all noble or splendid, but it was friendly and pleasant, and enabled the young ladies of the neighbourhood to display their prowess with bow and arrow; whereas the Kentish Toxophilites of Dartford Heath only admitted the sex as spectators.

Miss Heywood was much to the fore—shooting with so much aplomb and an air of being so very much better than anyone else that many simple people were surprised when she actually obtained only a fourth prize. Before the prizes were given, a bank of clouds, which had looked all the afternoon as if they meant mischief, resolved themselves into a downpour, and the little party of twenty or five and twenty persons sought the shelter of the house.

Following the instinct which told her in these days delicately to underline in public the fact of her engagement, Theo said presently in her clear tones which carried far, "David! Mrs. Gilray would like to see our dear old house. Shall we conduct a party?" and she led the way, first to the dining-room, with its fine carved mantelpiece, and then to the old tower and the charming room in it which had been Archibald Forrest's nursery.

Turning to the little group of ten or twelve which had followed her (and which was followed by David and Nancy) she said, "It is a pretty room, isn't it? David has promised I may make it my study." Laura Clutterbuck and Julia Meachin (of Dartford and the Reading Society) gasped admiration in the background of a female erudition which required a study, while other women spent their time netting purses or beading bags in drawing-rooms. Mrs. Gilray asked, "The date of your wedding is not fixed yet, is it?" and Miss Heywood replied, to be heard of all men, "Oh, yes! definitely, for July 17th."

In the background, King and Nancy

"stood there with never a third
But each to each, as each knew well."

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As Anstruther and Miss Burchell were walking home, half an hour later—King, dutifully escorting Theodora, being in front of them—Anstruther indicated Miss Heywood and said meditatively, "I don't blame that young woman for wanting to try her wings. Old Madam does everything for her—even to settling her tippets and bonnets. I heard her just now, talking wedding finery with Mother Clutterbuck. The way girls have to sacrifice themselves to their parents—especially to affectionate parents—is tragic—tragic! It's natural enough a clever creature like Theo should want to be her own mistress."

Sarah Burchell pointed at King's stalwart back. "Only not to be *his* master," she said: then, giving what may be called a dismal chuckle, added, "But I put my money on David King winning *that* tussle, all the same."

In a moment, Anstruther exclaimed, "Here's the legatee! Back already!" and sure enough, Peter Moor it was, leading his horse and looking something sprucer than usual. The little party all stopped: Theo offered the correct congratulations rather coldly—she had not seen Moor since his stroke of fortune, and did not approve (Sarah Burchell could have sworn it) of strokes of fortune coming to persons whom she could not herself personally recommend to Providence as deserving.

Moor tapped his boot thoughtfully with his riding whip, said, with more than a gleam of malice in his eye, looking at Miss Heywood, and in the shuffling tones habitual to him, "Of course I shall spend it foolishly!" and asked King to come and dine with him an hour later.

That King knew, in all his bones, what was coming, and would have avoided it if he could, is perfectly true; but he was neither coward nor shirker, and as fatalistic as are most of his profession.

A bachelor's establishment, if the bachelor be of a generous and hospitable turn of mind, is never wholly uncomfortable. The economies of women are apt to fall meanly on

real comforts: she will have bad dinners and new carpets, poor fires and rich curtains: whereas Moor concentrated all such efforts as he put forth—they consisted principally in growling at his cook-maid—on being properly fed and warmed. The growls, aided by an uneasy sensation at the back of Mary-Ann's mind that Miss Burchell somehow knew all she did and would make her sorry for it, resulted in the meal on the present occasion being quite decently cooked, if badly served. Dusk softened the deficiencies of Moor's parlour: and there was no doubt that, when he chose, he could show himself much the best brain in Inglethorpe. To be sure, that was not saying much perhaps: though there was a wise one under a spinsterish cap next door. To-night, Moor talked a good deal, and talked well. His habitual air of indifference was less marked, and King's silence was that of a good listener—certainly never that of one brimming with his own next utterance and determined, by hook or crook, to push it in.

When Mary-Ann had removed the cloth and set the decanters on the ill-polished table with a bang, and her bumps and clatters in the background, interspersed with the Old Hundredth—flat—revealed that she was washing up in the adjacent scullery, Moor fell into silence.

After the port had been round once or twice, he said, low, with his eyes on the stained table, "Are you disposed to do me a good turn?" Then, still not lifting his eyes, "I want you to say a good word for me to the old girl next door." He indicated Ferry Cottage with a nod of his head. "She likes you, and she don't think much of me: and now I'm a bit less of a pauper, I want to marry Nancy": and at last he raised his heavy eyes for half a second, and let them fall again.

King sat rigid in his place, not moving a muscle. "I'm sorry. I can't," he said.

There was silence: that is, in the dining-room: in the

scullery, bang—crash, and the abrupt termination of the Old Hundredth.

Moor went to the door, put his head out, and called irritably, "Confound you, Polly. Shut up!" Then he came to his seat, and asked, "Why not?"

King replied at once, "I don't think you are suited."

His face was perfectly steady and glum, his whole body taut and at attention. He looked at the wine in his glass for a moment, and drank nothing. Presently he saw in the expression of Moor's face the question, "Is that your only reason?" and speculated if it would pass his lips. It did not. Moor drank a glass or two of his port in silence. When he spoke again, it was of something else.

With the tea-tray, Polly also brought a message from a patient waiting in the surgery. Moor swore under his breath. "That will mean half an hour," he said. "The old fool wants his leg dressed."

King rose immediately, glad of the excuse to go. "I must be off, in any case," he said. "My mother's tired with that stupid entertainment we had this afternoon, and I must be getting back to her."

Outside, the dusk had slipped into darkness: a warm darkness, with the raindrops still trembling on the leaves, and heavy with the scents of midsummer.

Instead of passing Miss Burchell's gate, King entered it, walked softly round the Cottage, and, as on other occasion, took up his stand under its parlour window. There was no music to-night, but the window was open, and through it came the faint glow of candle-light. King stood perfectly still. In a minute or two, as if a magnet had drawn her, Nancy came on to the little balcony. When she saw him, his lips silently framed the words, "Nancy! come down." He did not know she had understood till the latch of the door clicked, and, in a second, she was "closer to him than breathing, nearer than hands or feet."

When she had freed herself a little, she said low and breath-

lessly, "Davie! Nothing is going to help us—we must do it ourselves. You were right! Theo doesn't mind if you care or not—I saw this afternoon that she means you to marry her—anyhow. But you mustn't! you mustn't!"

He answered, "I must though," in the tone whose significance Nancy knew.

She whispered eagerly, "What if *I* told her, David—the whole truth—that you cared for me instead?"

King answered, "She would tell you you wanted a change to the seaside—or a tonic—from Moor; and that I was the victim of a passing delusion and should soon come back—to my right mind. It's no good! I have bound myself of my own free will, and Theo has done nothing to justify my breaking with her. If I did—we should start wrong—and we could never be happy with Theo hurt and insulted—at our gates. I have given my word, and I have got to keep it."

She could feel his cheek on her hair, and her head was against his troubled heart.

"Don't marry Moor!" he said suddenly, in a stifled voice. "If he would make you happy, I would try to give you up——"

And Nancy interrupted, with a small laugh that was only not a sob, "Thank you: but I won't *be* given up—to Peter or anybody!" In another tone, she whispered, "Does Sal guess anything, do you think? She is so clever—she hardly ever misses seeing things, and she has been so cross lately she must be anxious about something! Sal would do anything for me—short of a crime!"

As on that night when King had first lingered in the garden of the Cottage to hear Nancy sing, a light rain began to patter on the leaves.

Neither noticed it.

David said, "After the 17th—when you have been away for a little—you must try to get some employment which you will earn a little money by—paid employment is the

best thing to make you—happier—especially if you want the money, as you do. I've thought it out."

Nancy fingered a button of his coat as she whispered back, "But unfortunately I don't want to earn money, but to house-keep you comfortably on yours!" Then, suddenly, "David! I can't breathe! Let me go—it's fearfully late. What *will* Sal think? Don't give up hoping—even now!"

When she got back to the parlour, Miss Burchell was indulging in a nap which, if not real, was so realistic an imitation that Nancy, looking at her, could not make up her mind. She sat down on a low chair by the fireplace, with her hands clasped lightly round her knees, and watched her aunt with her eyes, but not with her consciousness. In a few minutes, Miss Burchell roused, saying, as she straightened her cap and picked up her spectacle-case from the floor, "You might think I had been asleep! But I haven't—no one over forty owns to forty winks—it dates them! I closed my eyes in thought—I believe that's the formula. Shut the window, Nancy—it's getting late."

Looking down presently at her thin slippers, Nancy became conscious that they were earthy and that her hair and frock were damp, and also noticed that her aunt had not noticed these phenomena—and wondered.

Yet a few more petals were shaken from the rose, and the calendar marked exactly ten days to the wedding, when the Beech House barouche pulled up outside Ferry Cottage one afternoon, and Mrs. and Miss Heywood discovered Miss Burchell and Nancy in the garden.

The *négligé* and purely useful in attire was then severely frowned upon both in man and woman in polite Inglethorpe; Sarah Burchell alone would have dared to turn up her skirt over her petticoat, tie a rusty old hat down over her head with a handkerchief, and encase her hands in a pair of man's driving gloves—borrowed or stolen from the rectory—because that costume was the least hampering for gardening oper-

ations which she had at command. Far from apologising for it, she enjoyed the expression it evoked in the eyes of Theodora, and even in the beneficent orbs of Mrs. Heywood. As she removed the driving gloves, and a piece of twine which had been hanging about her like a necklace, she indicated a rustic seat, and having called Nancy, who had been among the vegetables, the four sat down in the sunshine.

Mrs. Heywood said, "We have come to ask a great favour, haven't we, Theo?" As she spoke she laid her plump little hand on Nancy's, who was next to her.

"Indeed we have!" Miss Heywood said graciously. Then, to Nancy, "Julia Meachin has been so silly as to get measles and leave a gap in the ranks of my bridesmaids at the last minute. Will you wear her frock and replace her?"

"No!" said Sarah Burchell, unceremoniously. "I can't have Nancy masquerading in other people's clothes, which wouldn't fit. I declined your mother's suggestion that Nancy should be bridesmaid eight weeks ago, and my reasons hold."

Mrs. Heywood was not in the least afraid of Miss Burchell: she had so good a conscience she was not afraid of anyone; so she turned to Nancy and said in her pretty old voice, "Dear John would have been quite hurt, and I shall be too, if you really can't persuade your aunt, Nancy!"

Nancy hesitated. After all, what did it matter?

"Sal isn't half as fierce as she sounds, Aunt Heywood," she said. "She will let me, I daresay—if the dress is there already, only going to be wasted——"

Theo interposed. "Mrs. Meachin is most anxious you should accept it as a gift, Nancy."

And Sarah Burchell retorted, "No gifts! I settle that with Mrs. Meachin, Theo."

Mrs. Heywood, who still had her hand on Nancy's, looked into her face. She was usually not at all observant, but to-day, turning to Miss Burchell, she said, "I think this child looks pale!"

"Every one's pale in hot weather," says Nancy lightly,

looking away; "unless it's people who are born red, like the Clutterbucks. Perhaps—later—Sal and I shall go off together for a change."

Apropos of change, Miss Heywood asked, "Did I tell you, David and I have decided on Salisbury for our honeymoon? I always had a desire to see Stonehenge, I don't know why."

And Miss Burchell—perhaps her nerves were strained, for it is certain she had much lost the habit of sleep—sharply retorted, "No, I shouldn't think you did! Has David King any *penchant* for Druids?"

And when Theo replied, with a slightly acidulated politeness, "David tells me he will be quite happy anywhere with me"; Miss Burchell rather respected her for so very ingenious a version of "Anywhere you like—I don't mind" which she felt sure had been, in substance, King's real answer.

She and Nancy saw their guests off in the barouche. As they themselves slowly returned to their gardening, Sarah Burchell spoke of it, and of it only.

The days were running away now like beads from a broken necklace: the rose had but few petals left.

The family lawyers of the houses of Heywood and King had met in solemn conclave and pitted their wits against each other. At Beech House, the wedding breakfast was settled to the final crumb, and Mrs. Heywood's fresh and simple joy in an eating and drinking so interesting and in the bridesmaids' frocks and bonnets, with their wreaths of forget-me-nots and their prayer-books (which David had been instructed to present) bound to match the flower, was as natural and as pleasant as sunshine.

The best guest-room was ready—to the very pins in the cushion—for Canon Norman, who was to arrive the day before the wedding. In John Heywood's dressing-room, Madam's wedding silk lay outspread, looking so exactly like herself that no one who had ever known her could possibly

doubt who it was that was destined amply and creakingly to fill that skeleton. In another room, the bride's slim white gown and chip bonnet lay displayed to the delight of cook, housemaids, and Louisa; and perhaps not quite so much to the indifference of the bride as it was the bride's pride to pretend.

Sometimes now, in the afternoon, Nancy went to Ivy Chimneys—Mrs. King's future home—and stitched there at curtains and chair coverings, in the low white-panelled drawing-room, half ready for its tenant, who slightly assisted in the sewing, and then sat for half an hour in an idleness Nancy dared not imitate. King was generally carpentering about the house: he had himself carried into it many of his mother's smaller possessions, such as her escritoire—the Grey Priory looking not all the worse—for in house furniture, as in writing, to deplete is nearly always to improve.

On the afternoon of July 14th—the Monday before the wedding, which was to be on Thursday—as Nancy was starting for Ivy Chimneys with her workbag, her aunt said, "I may be a little late for dinner, Nancy. I have to see Mr. Forrest about that old Brown who used to be his gardener, and then I suppose I shall have to walk into Dartford and get myself some fallals and nonsense—for this wedding. It's colder to-day"—the sky indeed was grey and overcast—"take your cloak with you." And Nancy, as one wholly indifferent, took her cloak from its peg and went her way, her aunt watching her till she was out of sight.

In the drawing-room at Ivy Chimneys that comfortable woman, Susan—who had come in to see to her kitchen to be, and to reduce it to the spotless order her soul loved—had lighted a little wood fire. Nancy sat down by it on the hearthrug, having deposited her bonnet on the sofa, and began stitching at the yards of muslin on her lap. Mrs. King, in her chair near her, also stitched—a little: sighed, looked into the fire: remembered herself, stitched a very little again, and presently took one of the bright curls which shaded

Nancy's face and twisted it round her finger—as she had done often at the Priory in those days when only one of them knew David.

He could be heard now at his carpentering, sawing or hammering, in one of the upper rooms. When he presently came into the parlour with a bookcase to be adjusted, Nancy looked up once and then went on stitching without again raising her eyes: King proceeded to fix the bookcase, and Mrs. King from time to time uttered a few little nothings to fill the silence.

Presently she said, "Why, here's Archibald!" and, sure enough, Forrest it was who came up the little brick path and into the parlour by its long French windows.

When he had greeted the party, he turned and looked about him, saying, "I came to see how the alterations were progressing. You will have a charmingly pretty little place here, Camilla! I envy you. With a large establishment, the cares and worries are perpetual—the outgoing expenses always increasing, and the satisfaction one gets out of it—*nil*! We should have been far wiser to have let Inglethorpe Place and lived here ourselves. It would have been better too for poor Adelaide's health."

Camilla, who was always taken in by this sort of grumbling, sympathised, and asked after Mrs. Forrest.

Archibald shook his head. "Far from well," he said. "But when is she well? I have her in bed to-day—very low and poorly. I sent for Dr. Graham yesterday—we always employ Graham now—Moor is so utterly indifferent to small ailments—pooh-poohs a common cold, as though a common cold were not often the insidious beginning of the most dangerous and fatal maladies!" Then, remembering just in time that he had a cough himself, he coughed slightly, and added, "I am none too grand myself—very unwholesome wheather this! Still, we must hope on, hope ever, I suppose. Ah! here's the bride to be."

Theo's thin pelerine revealed the pink frock which made

her look like a young tiger lily—the frock of the summer-house. To-day, the rose-coloured lining of her bonnet lent her face a glow, and there was something about her which suggested triumph. She had some books under her arm, which she put down on the *escritoire*, and looking about her, she turned to Forrest with, “Isn’t this a dear little place, Mr. Forrest? I am sure Mrs. King will be happy here!”

Camilla knew that, if that remark was to be made, it should have been made by herself. But Theo’s neighbourhood always fluttered the wits out of her. David, at the book-case, with the brass head of a nail in his mouth, mumbled that it still wanted a good bit doing to it.

Looking at Nancy on the hearthrug, Theo said, with patronage, “Nancy so loves stitching”—as she might have said, “Baby so loves his rattle.”

And Nancy replying, “There are such heaps of curtains wanted even in this tiny house,” did not lift her head from them.

Forrest, who had been looking out at the garden, now turned to Theodora with, “I was just saying, my wife and I have both been a good deal ailing, but Dr. Graham has assured us he will patch us both up for Thursday. We should be distressed not to be at the wedding.”

Respect for place and money is a quality apt to grow with our growth. Inglethorpe represented to Miss Heywood more and more the chief kingdom of the world, and of that kingdom, Forrest and his wife were undoubtedly the potentates. She said with a genuine warmth, “We should be *greatly* distressed too—shouldn’t we, David? Why, we should hardly feel ourselves married if you and Mrs. Forrest could not be there!”

And perhaps it was the brass-headed nail, which he still held in his mouth, which made King’s assent so markedly lacking in enthusiasm.

Taking up her books again, Miss Heywood said, “I must be off! Don’t forget, David, you are dining with us at

half-past six this evening." Then, to Nancy, "I have to go round to the Clutterbucks. Now we have history on hand for the Reading Society, I find those two girls constantly want keeping up to the mark."

Whereon Forrest put in (with a sort of dismal gallantry, for he had not been ill-pleased with Miss Heywood's recognition of the Forrest importance), "If you will allow me, I will go so far on my way with you. I must not be out too late—my throat is still very far from comfortable," and he cleared it, to see how uncomfortable it was.

Directly they had left Ivy Chimneys, Susan, having taken care to wait until her *bête noire* could not participate in the indulgence, brought in a homely brown teapot: King came and sat opposite Nancy, and they all three enjoyed their tea in a silence which this time Camilla did not break. The ruddy firelight made pleasant contrast with the downcast grey day without: the afternoon seemed to draw in quickly, as if it were autumn: and at six, when Nancy scrambled to her feet saying, "*How* late I shall be with Sal's dinner—let's hope she will be late herself!" the sky was dark with rain clouds.

David tied her cloak about her, and went with her to the gate. Mrs. King must have sat by herself for at least half an hour waiting for him, and, as usual, agitatedly asking of her conscience advice which she perfectly knew she would never have the courage to take.

When Nancy reached Ferry Cottage, Moor was leaning over the gate dividing the gardens. She perceived him, at first, with a quick annoyance: then with indifference, said, "What *are* you doing, Peter? I'm fearfully late," and turned as if to go into the house.

Moor detained her with, "Miss Burchell isn't back. There's no hurry": and she paused, reluctantly.

Then she looked up in his face, saw what he was going to say, and cared nothing whether he said it or not.

With his folded arms still on the gate, and still not

meeting her eyes, he said, "I suppose you know what I want to ask you?"

And it was something of the old Nancy who answered, "Please don't say you're going to propose to me—when you know it isn't any good and never will be! and you know you'd hate it yourself, sitting up prim and proper all day long on your best behaviour, trying to live up to Sal's standard of what you ought to be—to be worthy of me—" and she gave the ghost of a laugh. "*Please* be sensible, Peter!"

Moor said gravely—and this time he once raised his eyes and looked at her—"I'll chance all that, Nancy, if you'll chance me."

She answered sharply, with the irritation of strained nerves, "Well, then, I won't. Why do you bother me? You know I won't, Peter, and there's an end of it."

Anstruther and Miss Burchell had forgotten that even the most compassionate may feel too much pain to mind inflicting it, and—at bay, and at last—would turn and fight for her own wounded heart.

But Moor stood his ground: so far at least as to say, in the slouching voice that was his, "I'll pull up, Nancy—if that's what you want."

"It isn't!" says Nancy. "I don't want anything!"

At that opportune, or inopportune, moment, according to the point of view, Polly, with her large cap flying off her head, came running towards them, and ejaculated, panting, "Please, doctor, there's a man on an 'orse, as says his mistress is took very bad and will you come quick": and with one look at Nancy and a curse under his breath, Moor turned away.

In Ferry Cottage, Ralph tore downstairs, loudly shouting his pleasure, and in the kitchen Lavinia rose with leisure and dignity from sleep and a basket, stretched herself, and rubbed against Nancy's feet.

Nancy took off her cloak—she could still feel the touch of David's deft hands as he had tied it about her throat—hung

it behind the kitchen door with her bonnet, and began, mechanically and by instinct, as one does what one is accustomed to doing, laying the dinner in the dining-parlour. The darkness was not only from clouds, and it was certainly getting late. As Nancy put the soup into the saucepan and stood it by the kitchen fire ready for heating, the Dutch clock in the corner struck seven. At any other time, she would have been uneasy at Miss Burchell's lateness—for they were both punctual and methodical—but to-night it hardly seemed worth while to wonder what had kept her.

Nancy made up the kitchen fire, and then—chiefly because it was near, and she felt the profound bodily weariness which comes from a heavy heart—she sat down on the wooden chair which stood by the table, and there laid her head on her arm.

At last, reality looked her close in the eyes. It was too bad to be true—and it *was* true! It was unbearable David should suffer: yet it would have been unbearable too if he did not suffer. For herself, she felt the agony of the moment but not, as Sarah Burchell felt for her, the cruelty of the future—"the set grey life and apathetic end"—the cure, perhaps, worse than the malady. She hardly knew more to-night than that she wanted David, and David wanted her—and that he would marry Theo.

Ralph's hygienically cold nose here inserted itself with surprising suddenness into the hand that hung inert at her side—for though he had not failed to take his meals and walks with his usual enthusiasm, he knew perfectly that all was not well with his home and relations. Nancy laid her hand on his head—mechanically—hardly heeding him.

The kitchen was getting dark: the firelight played on the shining pots and pans, the red brick floor, the cups and jugs hanging on the dresser: and after the usual preparatory effort and rumbling in its inside, the Dutch clock struck a solemn eight.

Eight!

Miss Burchell, as she had herself expressed it, was foolish and unfeminine enough to have no love of a bonnet shop. She could not possibly be choosing a wedding Dunstable for all these hours! But she could stand reading by a second-hand stall, as her niece knew by experience, until that niece dragged her bodily away. And, anyhow, what did it matter?

Once more, Nancy's curly head dropped on her arm on the table. Ralph rubbed himself—to comfort—about her feet: sighed deeply: sat staring in the fire: sighed once more: and then curled up and went to sleep.

Nancy herself, perhaps, "slept for sorrow" awhile, like the sorrowful watchers in a Garden long ago.

When she woke with a start, Miss Burchell was standing by her side in the last flicker of firelight, with her face worn and lined, and with hands that shook a little as they unfastened the brooch which pinned her shawl, saying:

"Nancy! Something has happened! Poor Mrs. Forrest died suddenly this afternoon—and the wedding is postponed for a month."

CHAPTER XVII

AN OPEN DOOR

WHEN Sarah Burchell had called at Inglethorpe Place that afternoon, Channing, the Forrests' butler, had informed her that his master had "stepped" down to Ivy Chimneys to see Mrs. King, and that his mistress was upstairs in her room, very ailing indeed. As the Forrests were always ailing, no one accounted anything of their ailments, so what made Sarah Burchell, when she had got half-way down the drive, turn back, saying to herself, "I'll sit with that poor lonely creature for half an hour," she never knew, unless it was the direct Hand of God. Anyhow, turn back she did: worsted Channing and the parlourmaid, who had both been instructed to refuse visitors, and found herself in the vast, cold, historical bedchamber, once occupied by Cardinal Wolsey, and now by Adelaide Forrest, whose attenuated figure was absorbed in the great deeps of the feather bed.

Inglethorpe Place was pre-eminently one of those which are admirable rather than enviable; Sarah Burchell always said it sent her back to her cottage, her fireside and her buttered toast, wondering if the good things of life really were so very unequally distributed after all: and this dark afternoon, as she followed the maid through the long panelled corridors, with their mullioned windows, she shivered and felt as if human beings were an anachronism and ghosts were not. By the time she had reached Mrs. Forrest's room, and drawn aside the curtains of the great carved oak bedstead, she was so sincerely sorry for the poor, rich creature who lay there—whose sole prop and joy in life was Archibald For-

rest, with his wrinkled forehead and his peevish soul—that the formal apologies for her intrusion died on her lips, and in the warm, generous voice, which she only used to those she really liked, she said, as she stood looking down at the invalid:

“My dear! I didn’t like to think of you all alone here on this gloomy afternoon, so I insisted on coming up to sit with you for half an hour. I shan’t bother you with talking if you are not equal to it.”

Mrs. Forrest just opened her eyes—those light eyes which always looked tear-washed—smiled slightly, and said, “Thank you—it was very kind!”

Miss Burchell took a chair by the bedside: watched Mrs. Forrest’s face closely for a few minutes: then put her capable hand over the thin one on the coverlet and felt for the pulse. After a minute or two she said, very distinctly, “You are feeling very weak, aren’t you?” and was not surprised that, though by the expression of her face Mrs. Forrest seemed to hear, she made no audible answer.

Sarah Burchell was not learned in medical text-books, and certainly had none of that morbid interest in symptoms which the Forrests had themselves. But she had a large practical experience of illness, and a well-grounded confidence in her own judgment on it. She rose, pulled the bell-rope smartly, and when she presently heard the footsteps of the maid in the corridor, went out of the room to meet her, softly closing the door behind her.

Knight, the lady’s maid, an elderly, pinched person, was of the opinion that Miss Burchell’s social position in no way justified her thrusting herself into other people’s bedrooms and ringing bells for servants, not her own. Miss Burchell looked at her, straight between the eyes, and said in a low voice, very clearly:

“Knight! your mistress is seriously ill. Go downstairs as quickly as you can and get some brandy and some hot milk. Tell them in the kitchen to fill the warming pan and heat

some blankets, and send one of the housemaids to light Mrs. Forrest's fire and one of the grooms into Dartford at once to fetch Dr. Graham."

Knight looked at her coldly. She was not a bad servant, in that she did her duty so long as that duty did not interfere with her meals, her rest, or her liberties, but she was not minded to take orders from an interloper. So she said, in very clipped tones, "Dr. Graham saw my mistress yesterday morning. He did not think there was anything at all serious the matter with her, and I have carried out all his instructions."

"And now," says Sarah Burchell, again looking her straight between the eyes, "you will carry out mine."

After a few sips of the hot milk and brandy, Mrs. Forrest seemed to revive a little. She said she felt very ill: added, with a faint smile, that she and Archibald were always much of invalids, as Miss Burchell knew: and, in answer to a question, that Dr. Graham had said she was suffering from a bilious fever.

"Old fool!" Sarah Burchell muttered within herself: and aloud, "That is what gives you the difficulty in breathing, I suppose?" but the invalid's eyes had closed again, and if she heard, she did not answer.

Sarah Burchell sat for perhaps half an hour watching the patient very attentively: she could feel a thin thread of pulse now, and the long pale hand on the coverlet was less deadly cold.

Presently, far off in that great house, there were sounds of a door opening and shutting, and of voices: then silence. The self-constituted nurse rose quickly, and, having made up up the newly lit fire with those most silent and efficacious of all tongs—the fingers—stole out of the room. Knight was in the passage—not quite believing in what she called "old Burchell's scares"—but not quite daring to disbelieve, either. Miss Burchell bade her sit with her mistress and induce her, if she could, to take the milk and brandy; then herself pro-

ceeded downstairs to the library, which was Archibald Forrest's sanctum.

He was there, as she had expected, just returned from Ivy Chimneys, and, as she instantly saw by the vexation on his face, informed of the events of the afternoon and of her own part in them.

She took any words that might have been in his mouth out of it immediately. "You must forgive what looks like unwarrantable interference on my part, Mr. Forrest," she said; "your wife is very ill: in my opinion, critically ill. I have therefore taken the liberty of sending one of your men for Dr. Graham—who should be here by now," and she looked at the clock.

Forrest replied irritably that the man had returned saying Dr. Graham was out and not expected back until late in the evening. He added, "He was here only yesterday, Miss Burchell, and I must tell you his opinion of Adelaide was an entirely different one to yours. Delicate and constantly ailing as my poor wife always is—for that matter, as I myself constantly am—" here Forrest again remembered his cough—

Sarah Burchell strode ruthlessly across these meanderings. "As Dr. Graham is not available," she said, "send at once for Peter Moor! Don't delay, Mr. Forrest. I have had some experience of illness—and I am certain your wife is very gravely ill indeed. Old Graham—in my opinion a precious old idiot at the best of times—has made a very bad blunder. Put your pride in your pocket and call in Moor. He's no fool—whatever his faults may be. If I'm wrong—as I hope I may be—turn me out of the house and cut me dead for the rest of your life. But if there's one chance in a thousand that I'm right—take it."

She was standing on the hearthrug, facing him—a homely figure enough in her plain shawl, old bonnet and clod-hopping country boots (when satin or merino were the only wear), but there was force, dignity, breeding about her,

which had their way. Forrest rang the bell: gave an order that Dr. Moor should be fetched immediately, and followed Miss Burchell—exuding, indeed, protest and dislike of her from every pore in his body—to his wife's room.

When, some five and twenty minutes later, Moor entered it, Miss Burchell gave him one quick nod and herself returned to the library. She had sat there alone for about half an hour, with a book which she had taken from one of the shelves before her eyes but not before her mind, when he came in quietly, and she looked up into his face with searching question in her own.

In emergency, Moor was always at his best: his slovenly manner left him: he was keen and alert, as nature had meant him to be. "It's pretty bad," he said. "Both lungs congested, and great heart weakness. Do you think that woman up there can be trusted to carry out my orders? Forrest's no good, of course—he's simply fussing and getting in the way."

"And that old Graham has been treating her for a bilious fever!" Miss Burchell said meditatively. "That's medical science, I suppose?"

Moor considered his boots attentively and made no reply to this onslaught on his professional brother. Then he asked, "Can *you* sit up with her to-night?"

And Miss Burchell replied, "I suppose I can, as I don't mind thrusting myself in where I am not wanted, and can be as impervious to hints as any woman living."

"Well, Forrest's pretty badly frightened," Moor rejoined. "I fancy he will be exceedingly grateful to you." Looking vaguely about for his hat, he added, "I am going to make her up some medicine—I'll be back in half an hour or so, and I can give you the instructions for the night then."

Sarah Burchell recovered the hat, which her sharp orbs had detected on a distant chair, and handed it to him.

Except that he wanted to marry Nancy, she had no quarrel with Peter Moor, and even on that point she was the open, honest foe whom an Englishman can scarcely ever bring him-

self to hate. She now exchanged with him something between a nod and a *coup d'œil*, as man to man, and when she heard the front door close behind him, returned to Mrs. Forrest's room.

Archibald Forrest's distress was of the kind which visibly distressed the patient: about every few minutes he anxiously asked her how she felt: so, when at seven Miss Burchell suggested he should go down and dine, Mrs. Forrest, overhearing, as she was meant to, opened her eyes, smiled faintly, and intimated that she also wished him to do so.

Miss Burchell followed him out of the room. She was sincerely sorry for him: his reliance on herself, whom he normally disliked with as much vehemence as was in him, had something pathetic in it. She whispered, "Get yourself a glass of wine and a crust of bread, anyhow, Mr. Forrest. It will please her. If I see any change for the worse, I will send Knight for you immediately."

The poor man asked, "Does Moor think so badly of her as that?"

And Sarah Burchell—cruel only to be kind, for she saw, or thought she saw, that Adelaide Forrest had not many hours to live—replied, "He considers the heart weakness very serious indeed."

For half an hour she sat alone with the sick woman—watching the pale face on the pillow with a close and silent attention. Presently she put her hand over Adelaide Forrest's, and saw by the expression of her face that the action pleased her.

Poor thing! Poor thing! Who seemed to have had so much, and had had so little—who had known the deadly ennui of competence, but hardly any of the enjoyment of the rich beauties of a beautiful world, which it makes possible. Inglethorpe had bounded her little life: all her soul and her hopes were narrowed to it. Poor thing! Poor thing! Who had neither love nor children, nor any intellectual satisfaction: who was to die without having lived.

Some such thoughts traversed Sarah Burchell's mind. Then she believed that she saw a change in the sick woman's face, which her eyes had never left. She bade Knight, who was waiting in the corridor, fetch her master at once, and ten minutes later, without a sigh or a sign, Adelaide Forrest was dead.

As Sarah Burchell—a very weary woman—was trudging from Inglethorpe Place to Beech House, about eight o'clock, she saw Anstruther at the rectory gates. She gave him a few details of the tragedy, of which he had already heard from a villager; then added:

"Nancy doesn't know yet. I'm going to Beech House first. Mrs. Heywood must be told as soon as possible, for there is none too much time to postpone the wedding."

Anstruther's eyes were suddenly attentive. "*Can it be postponed?*" he said; and as his cousin pursued her way, she looked back over her shoulder to say curtly, "It must be!"

He stood watching her stalwart back until it disappeared over the hill.

In the drawing-room at Beech House King, Theo and Mrs. Heywood were unpacking some newly arrived wedding presents; and as Miss Burchell was announced her mind received the impression that they were giving a great deal of pleasure to Mrs. Heywood and a very pale reflex of it to bride and bridegroom.

Hating intrusion on her own evenings, Miss Burchell never intruded on other people's, so her entry was a surprise. Mrs. Heywood, whose mind ran inevitably to hospitality, said, "You're just in nice time for a cup of coffee!" Miss Heywood's expression was cold. King instantly detected something was amiss.

When she had told them what it was, "the Shadow cloaked from head to foot" fell across them all. There was silence. Then Mrs. Heywood and Theo asked a few questions: King said, "I'll go to Inglethorpe Place and see if I can do any-

thing to help old Archibald," and Sarah Burchell saw that he was moved, for he had liked his cousin's wife, as she had liked him.

Mrs. Heywood had begun to pour out the coffee, which was on the table before her, crying a little to herself. Putting down the coffee-pot suddenly, she exclaimed, "And Theo's wedding is in three days!" After a pause, looking at Theo, she added, "I don't see how we can possibly put it off?"

Miss Burchell gave the bride time to speak; but she did not speak. King, who had a long piece of string in his hand from one of the packages, rolled it slowly round a finger, and did not utter a word. So, very deliberately, "Since you ask me," says Sarah Burchell, who had not been asked, and knew it, "I don't see how you can possibly do anything else!"

Mrs. Heywood's mind took a kind of inventory of the wedding feast—how long tongues already glazed and hams duly bread-crumbed may be warranted to keep: and then went on to points of secondary interest, such as the visitors and the finery.

"Mr. Forrest spoke of having the funeral on Saturday," said Sarah Burchell. "The black hangings would be kept up in the church at least two Sundays. Of course, no wedding could take place until after that, and then it would naturally have to be one of the very quietest description—no guests, breakfast or pretty frocks": and between sips of hot coffee—the first refreshment she had tasted since her light luncheon at one o'clock—Miss Burchell's weary eyes watched Mrs. Heywood's face.

It was one of the articles of that lady's simple faith never to defraud oneself, or anyone else, of innocent pleasures. The china blue eyes clouded a little. "Oh, that *would* be a pity!" Elizabeth Heywood exclaimed. "And so dreadfully wasteful! But if we waited a month perhaps——"

And Miss Burchell intervened, "Well, a month would be a very different thing. But sooner, festivities would hardly

be decent. We are all one family in this place, as it were" (like other prudent people, Miss Burchell had certainly guarded against seeing too much of her relatives), "and I don't think when one house is mourning the others can be openly rejoicing—apart from the fact that David is closely connected with the Forrests": and she looked towards King, who was still rolling the string round his finger, and aggravated her by not speaking until, like the wise woman she was, she reflected that sometimes the surest way of getting what one wants is not to ask for it.

Then Theo, sitting upright on the sofa, put in her reasonable word. "It would be perfectly possible, if necessary," she said, "for David and me to be quietly married in London without any of the fuss which, I quite agree, would be just at present in very bad taste. If David gets his ship shortly, as he expects, mama and I could go and stay at Canon Norman's for a few days and the marriage could take place at his church in the City."

As King took Miss Burchell's cup for replenishment, he replied, "But I don't think I am a bit likely to go off at a moment's notice, Theo! The owners would be sure to be considerate, under the circumstances."

Mrs. Heywood, who had been not so much listening as continuing practical projects in her head, now observed meditatively, "I shall send David round to all the neighbours tomorrow with notes, saying the wedding is postponed just the four weeks—till August 14th. I must catch the morning post to put off dear Emma—if I miss it, we shall have her here for more than a month instead of a week." (This prospect for a moment dimmed even Mrs. Heywood's incurable optimism, for her sister Emma was of those who may be warranted to upset the peace of Paradise if they pay it any but the briefest visit.) "I shall beg poor Mr. Forrest to accept those beautiful tongues and the pressed beef for the funeral luncheon—it will save Mrs. Marshall" (the Forrests' cook) "when she is busy, and when David is delivering the notes in

Dartford, he can postpone the ices. The cake will keep nicely: they eat better kept. Some of the peaches and nectarines will be ready by August, and the weather is no more uncertain than in July. The glass now is far from promising—so perhaps the 17th would have been wet.” Then the speaker’s kind old heart went back to poor Forrest, and the sad event which had so suddenly bereaved him, and she cried a little, quietly, to herself.

King rose. “I must just see my mother,” he said, “before I go to the Place; she will be greatly upset, and I must write to Mr. Gilmour to postpone his coming until August.”

Sarah Burchell perceived—not without surprise, for she had never been quite sure how much vigorous sense David King’s simplicity covered—that this speech set sign and seal to the postponement of the marriage. She also saw that Theo, like the sensible woman she was, accepted the inevitable with philosophy. There was indeed no reason why David’s honour, sound in July, should crack in August: and Theo was not without the feeling that Mrs. Forrest of Inglethorpe Place had, as it were, a right to die and upset things, not possessed by insignificant persons in humbler circumstances: while she certainly did not desire, unless necessary, to exchange what may be called the stately splash of a wedding in Inglethorpe—in the midst of friends, relatives, admirers and envious—for a union wholly without drum, trumpet, or any audience but a mother, a clerk and a pew-opener.

Although Nancy Legard had indeed “the heart which bleeds afresh for every soul,” her first thoughts, when she comprehended the startling news of Mrs. Forrest’s death, were wholly of the effect it had on David and herself. The deep blessedness of a great relief suddenly flooded her soul: the sword which had been suspended above their heads by a hair was removed: and if, as David had said very truly on a former occasion, a reprieve is not a pardon, when the execu-

tion is to take place on Thursday a reprieve arriving on Monday does inevitably make one hopeful of life and fate.

In the parlour that evening, when the wood fire Nancy had lit chirped and crackled in the grate, Miss Burchell, having placed her oldest and easiest shoes on her tired feet, sat in her deep chair warming them on the fender, while Nancy, with Lavinia purring on her lap, said, after a long silence:

"Poor Mr. Forrest! I can't bear to think of him in that great dismal place all alone! Solitude must be so much more solitary in a big house than in a little one; and Mr. and Mrs. Forrest never seemed to have any interests or anything they much cared for except each other. *Poor Mr. Forrest!*" and she sighed a long sigh and looked into the fire.

Sarah Burchell opened her weary eyes. "There you are again, Nancy!" she said, "exaggerating other people's susceptibilities. Poor Archibald Forrest has had a terrible shock and is, for the time being, a greatly broken man. His having no children of course makes it worse for him. But we must remember that, after all, as we know very well, his is a cold temperament, and not an unselfish one."

Nancy put a fallen stick or two with her fingers on to the fire. "But then, Sal," she said, "Mrs. Forrest was a piece of his own life and importance. I do believe he will feel dreadfully sore and hurt with Providence for ruthlessly cutting away a part of himself like that, and that he is so wretched he would quite love *anybody*—even you, Sal"—and Nancy permitted herself a small laugh—"who would be kind and compassionate to him now."

Miss Burchell's eyes, which for a moment had been singularly alive, closed again as in slumber.

Inglethorpe Place had always had a reputation in the village for extreme closeness in money matters, so when it heard that Mr. Forrest proposed to present every poor man, woman and child with a black cloak in which, first, to appear at

Mrs. Forrest's funeral, and, after, to keep warm in winter, it was pleasantly surprised.

Mrs. Heywood, requested by Archibald to select the garments, enjoyed the task exceedingly. Miss Heywood suggested that Mr. Forrest would have been better advised (possibly meaning if he had taken her advice) had he shown some discrimination in the gifts, and not bestowed them upon just and unjust alike, whereat Miss Burchell (she and Nancy had come up to Beech House two days before the funeral to help direct and distribute the presents) tartly responded, "Still, the wicked feel the cold as much as the virtuous, I suppose!" and Theo rebuked the impertinence by one of the stately silences of which she was so much more the mistress than was Miss Burchell.

At this moment, Nancy saw David King on the gravel path outside. He came into the room by the long windows, which stood ajar. After a minute or two, speaking with that diffidence with which he always spoke of his own affairs, he turned to Theo with:

"Theo! I came to tell you. I have been offered the command of a fine brig, trading with the Mediterranean. She will load a general cargo in London, and we shall call in Italy, Greece, the Ionian Islands and Smyrna for silk, olive oil, currants and all that sort of thing. I have to go up to Newcastle to-morrow for a few days to see my owners, and I expect, if I can engage my crew and collect my cargo by then, I should be due to sail about the end of August."

If Theo was not reminded, David was, of a cool autumn morning in the old schoolroom at Beech House and the very early days of their engagement, when he had told her of his appointment to the "Pearl," and had supposed that the coolness of her manner hid the warmth of her heart. He did not suppose it now.

After a brief consideration, she looked up from the cloaks she was ticketing and said, "That will leave us hardly a fortnight for our honeymoon, will it? Well, perhaps it is just

as well. I am sure I ought not to be away longer. Classes and meetings always suffer if the head is absent."

There was a sublime egoism about this altruism which struck even Mrs. Heywood, who usually saw nothing.

She said, "A fortnight is very short, Theo! One only has one honeymoon in one's life." Then, strictly practical, added as a second thought, "At least, most likely one only has one!"

That Theo should observe that with David as well as herself duty had to come before pleasure, was only to be expected—and she observed it.

Miss Burchell, with her eyes thoughtfully on King, said to him, "Well, you're lucky! You will be able to combine the two on a voyage like that—

‘The isles of Greece! the isles of Greece,
Where burning Sappho loved and sung!’ ”

After a pause, she added, "When I was a girl I drove with my cousin Richard and his parents from Marseilles to Genoa. I suppose I was young and ardent—but it seemed to me like the new Heaven and the new Earth."

Theo, writing labels, prevented further rhapsodies on foreign parts, of which in general she disapproved, by asking the name of the ship: and there was only the briefest pause before King answered, "She used to be called the 'Lucilla'; but she was unlucky under that name, so they are re-christening her."

Mrs. Heywood, who had completely forgotten the honeymoon of the future in the cloaks of the present, now folded the last of the pile before her and suggested that she and Theo should accompany Miss Burchell and Nancy on their errand of distribution in the village. When they had gone to don outdoor things, Sarah Burchell, catching sight of the old gardener without, went into the garden to speak to him, and David, from the hearthrug, said in a low voice to Nancy, still busy at the table:

"What do you think is the new name the owner has chosen for my ship?"

Nancy looked up, quickly, inquiring.

"The Nancy," says David King.

Then Theo came in, ready to go out.

Saturday—the day of the funeral—brought very wet weather and a crowded church. All humble Inglethorpe was there—in the new cloaks. Mrs. Forrest had been of the passive character which is never ill-liked: her family had been an institution in Inglethorpe for hundreds of years: and, with shrewd intuition, the poor were perfectly aware that that best hated quality, closeness, for which Inglethorpe Place had so ugly a name, had always emanated from its lord rather than from its lady. Beech House and Ferry Cottage, having no menkind to pay the last mark of respect to poor Adelaide Forrest, decided to waive the then universal prejudice against women attending funerals. It must have been five o'clock in the afternoon before the last carriage had rolled away, and Miss Burchell and her niece returned on foot to Ferry Cottage, very tired, and in a steady cold rain.

About half an hour after their dinner, as Nancy was playing softly to herself on the spinet—softly, being foolish enough to pamper Ralph's objections to music—her aunt came in, shawled and bonneted.

Nancy turned, astonished. "Wherever *are* you going, Sal?" she exclaimed.

Miss Burchell replied—firmly, as one who expected to be gainsaid—that she was going up to the rectory for an hour's chat with her cousin Richard. Meeting Nancy's eye, she added, finally, "On a matter of business!"

The generation which demanded that the young person should be perfectly ignorant of affairs and perfectly respectful to its elders could not have found its ideal in Nancy Legard.

She replied, "Oh! but there isn't any business to consult

Cousin Richard about. Our four little July dividends all came in to the minute. I don't believe it's business! *Please* don't be such an old bag of mystery, Sal, and just tell me what you are really going to see Cousin Richard about at this time of night and in this pouring rain!" and to coax her, Nancy untied her aunt's bonnet-strings and re-tied them in a wide, smart bow, and kept hold of its ends—to hold her to an answer.

"Now, leave me alone, Nancy," Sarah Burchell said, pulling herself away, "or you will break what really is a bag of mystery, at present in a parcel under my arm! No! I'm not going to tell you what it is—and I'm not going to tell you what I intend to say to Richard. So it's no use your worrying me."

As she descended the narrow stairs, Nancy called after her, "You're not going to make Cousin Richard give me another new frock, are you, Sal?"

And Miss Burchell replied, "Of course I'm not!"

For half an hour after she had gone, Nancy sat at the spinet with her hands on the silent keys, deeply considering. Then, with a long sigh, she roused herself and began to sing—for the first time for weeks.

CHAPTER XVIII

DEUS EX MACHINA

ANSTRUTHER was at dessert when Miss Burchell was ushered into the rectory dining-room. The highly polished surface of the "naked table" was set with fine silver and china; two great candelabra shed a soft candlelight; and a fire burnt on the hearth. Benson, the butler, having provided Miss Burchell with a chair, dessert plate and glasses, she loosened her shawl, took from beneath it the mysterious parcel of which she had spoken to Nancy, laid it carefully on the table beside her, and after she and Anstruther had exchanged a few remarks about the funeral, slowly sipped the glass of port he had poured out for her.

Presently she said, "This is the 1815, isn't it, Richard? it's a very fine wine, but will still bear keeping." She was an excellent judge of wine, and not ashamed to be. After a pause she added meditatively, "How my dear old father would have enjoyed a glass!" and sipped her own.

Anstruther was quite well aware that his cousin had not flouted Mrs. Grundy by paying him a solitary evening call simply to discuss his port. So he drank his own leisurely, and waited.

In about five minutes she spoke.

"Richard!" she said in a low voice. "I have become more and more convinced that there is only one way of happiness for Nancy—marriage with David King."

Anstruther made a gesture of impatience. "Now, Sarah," he said, "you know perfectly well that, but for poor Mrs. Forrest's death, King would be already married to Theo, and

you and I would be considering the best possible alternative for Nancy. That is what we had better do now."

Miss Burchell shook her head.

"That's the point, Richard," she said. "There is no good alternative. Nancy is one of the women so obviously meant by Providence for their natural rôle in life, that she must be a misfit in any other."

Anstruther leant forward a little, his lean hand playing with his empty wineglass and his eyes fixed on it. "Other women, Sally," he said, "have also been pre-eminently fitted for that life. Yet they do find another, and make no bad job of it."

A softness, which brought back for a moment some of her handsome youth, came into Sarah Burchell's face. "My dear Richard," she said, "indeed they do! But I've had Nancy, remember—and there are my books. To be sure, I ought to have done something with them—creative work's the thing! Well, perhaps, one of these days——" She paused a minute: then resumed, "Creative work! that's true, in another sense, of Nancy. She has plenty of character and intelligence, as we know, but, all the same, she lives by her heart not by her brain, and it's not the children of the mind which will satisfy her. Marry her to David King, and she will be one of the tenderest and happiest of women, and will find plenty of scope for her practical good sense and efficiency. But, if not"—for once Sarah Burchell's voice was not perfectly steady—"I suppose I shall see her lonely and dissatisfied, filling her time with futile amusements or futile benevolences—Nancy will detect their futility very well—sourer perhaps and poor——"

"Now, Sally!" Anstruther put in, "that's painting the picture unnecessarily black. Not poor! You know, when my time comes, she will be well provided for: and as for the futility of benevolence, some people manage to believe in its efficacy and derive the greatest personal satisfaction from the practice of it—witness Theo."

"Theo's a freak," said Miss Burchell firmly. Then, as she saw, or thought she saw, argument travelling from Anstruther's eyes to his lips, she put up her hand to stay it, and repeated firmly, "A freak! I'm not fool enough to deny that energetic, sensible, single women have done, and will do, an immense amount of good in the world: but we flout nature all the same: we were all created to be the helpmeets and the mothers of men, and the best we do outside that, is beside the mark—as the wise among us know very well. The wise, I said—not the clever! Nancy knows. And that is why, as David King is as much attached to her as she is to him, I am still perfectly determined—if there's any way left to do it—to eliminate Theo." And Sarah Burchell's lips took their most determined line.

Anstruther pushed back his chair, and began to pace the room—irritably.

"But there *is* no way, Sarah!" he said. "Unless you have recourse to a poisoned bowl and a dagger. Take a cheque, and take Nancy abroad. I've advised it fifty times. It's a great pity you haven't gone already. I was exceedingly sorry myself the marriage had to be put off—it simply prolongs the agony. Take her away—there are other excellent young men in the world, and excellent young women sometimes change their minds!"

"And sometimes they don't," says Sarah Burchell. Presently she added, as if to herself, "I must say, I don't think Peter Moor is going to be the danger I feared. If one can judge—and it's a fairly infallible test—by his having ceased to brush his clothes and taken again to that perfectly shocking old hat—Nancy has given him his *congé*. Not a word to me! I respect her for that. Now Moor, as he is at present—I attribute the supineness entirely to too much of this," Sarah Burchell lightly tapped her port glass—"sits down and accepts defeat. *I don't*. In spite of you, Richard, there *is* a way out, and you are the person to take it."

At this juncture, Benson entered with the coffee, and hand-

ed it, with the leisurely efficiency of the well-trained servant. Miss Burchell waited until his steps had quite died away in the long corridor which led to the kitchen quarters, then raised her eyes steadily to her cousin's—he was standing with his back to the fire looking down at her—and exclaimed:

“Richard! What we have to do, and as quickly as possible, is to make Archibald Forrest fall in love with Theo, Theo throw over David King, and leave him to be happy with Nancy ever after—and this house”—she looked round the handsome panelled dining-room as if she were ascertaining its histrionic capabilities—“is where it must be done.”

Anstruther turned, and bending over the fire to move a log with his boot, said, “Anything else, my dear Sarah? anything else?”

Just for a moment a smile showed itself on Sarah Burchell's face, then faded, and left its expression grim, tired and resolute, as before. “God forgive me, Richard!” she said, in a deep voice. “The idea flashed into my mind when I was actually sitting by the bedside of that poor dying creature. If we are to be judged by our involuntary thoughts, then, as I say, God forgive me and all people of lively imagination! All the time I was trying by every means I knew to keep the life in her, I was calculating what I stood to gain by her death. Poor Adelaide! Poor Adelaide! Yet, if she came back to-night from where we shall all see clearly, face to face—I believe she would understand.”

And for a moment, except the ticking of the clock, there was silence.

It was in her most brisk and practical tone, that Sarah Burchell resumed, “To-morrow morning, Richard, you must go up to Inglethorpe Place and insist on seeing Mr. Forrest. Insist, mind! He will be refusing visitors, of course, most rightly and properly: but if I've not made a mistake, half a guinea will work wonders with that sleek, covetous-looking Channing: and of course you *are* the rector of the parish,

and it's your duty, as it were, to thrust yourself in. Once in, all you have to do is to persuade Mr. Forrest to shut up the Place at once, and come and stay here with you for the next three weeks."

Anstruther had shown signs of considerable restiveness all through this speech. The spoilt boy is the spoilt boy for ever: though Fate had not spared him the great trials, he was thoroughly unused to being crossed in trifles. He returned sharply, "Nonsense, Sally! I am not going to make myself ridiculous by going off to Inglethorpe Place at cockcrow to-morrow to try to induce a man whom I don't like, and who does not like me, to come and bore me to death with three weeks of his dismal society. Besides, he would refuse. You must think of something else."

"I said nothing about cockcrow, Richard," Miss Burchell retorted firmly. "On the other hand, the normal human being is always fractious before eleven, so I should certainly give Mr. Forrest until twelve. He *will* bore you dreadfully, of course, but—"it is the cause—it is the cause, my soul!" As to his refusing to come: remember, people are very susceptible to kindness when their hearts are as sore as that poor man's is now. Nancy put her finger on that point. Yes, Richard, cold and selfish people can feel acutely a loss which upsets their habits and disturbs their comfort. Put it as low as that, if you like. Then, too," here a faint gleam came into Miss Burchell's eye, "he's so rich—and you rich people do so enjoy your little economies!—that it will quite appeal to him to save by shutting up that big house for a few weeks and putting the servants on board wages. And, if all other inducements fail—you must bribe him—by this."

Anstruther looked up. His air was strictly non-committal—that of one who consents to hear an argument, by which he is not likely to be convinced, patiently, to the very end.

His cousin began to untie the parcel which she had brought with her from Ferry Cottage, and presently produced from

it two rare old dessert plates, white and gold, of an exquisiteness apparent even to the eye of ignorance.

"My ewe-lamb!" she said, holding them up, one in each hand. "You would think now that man, with his cabinets stuffed full of priceless stuff, would have been ashamed to cast covetous eyes on my only beauty! Not a bit of it! Mr. Forrest—and you, too, Richard, though I own in a minor degree—feel that having so much is a sign that Providence really intended you should have everything worth having. Can't I hear Archibald complaining that this dessert service is entirely out of place in Ferry Cottage?—meaning, it would be *in* place in his Place. Well, if he looks like declining your invitation, say I've had financial losses (or any other lie that suits you—it's all one to me) and had he been able to come to you, you could have shown him a specimen plate of my white and gold set which, at the moment, I'm half inclined to sell. 'Souvent femme varie.' Imply that, of course. He'll need the spice of uncertainty."

Anstruther, who had come forward to examine the plates, put them down, saying, "Well, suppose he comes. Are we much further on?"

Miss Burchell looked up at him as he stood with his hand on the mantelpiece. "You're the rector of the parish, I'm again obliged to remind you," she said, "and Theo's your right hand in it. A note—asking her opinion about the Clothing Club or the Provident Society, brings her and her mother round here the same afternoon. A *partie carrée*! I am supposing you don't monopolise Theo the whole time, Richard, and I am also supposing you are aware how one thing can be made to lead to another. If you are anything of a tactician, the next day you and Archibald stroll up to Beech House to look at something in one of the hot-houses: the next, Theo and the old lady will be dining with you quite quietly *en famille*—it will be most suitable as Mrs. Heywood is herself still in mourning. After dinner, she plays as usual on the piano, you go to sleep, and the *young* people," here Miss

Burchell smiled grimly, "stroll out of the long windows to enjoy the garden, the harvest moon and the nightingales."

"My dear Sarah!" says Anstruther, with a shiver, "curb your imagination! I can see Forrest, whose feet must never get wet, and who has a chronic catarrh—isn't it?—in the larynx, having any dealings with nightingales in this weather!"

"It will have changed," replied Sarah Burchell firmly, as if Providence had signed an agreement with her on the subject. Then, impatiently, "You must manage the details yourself. They should be easy enough."

"Possibly—if the pair had any attraction to each other," Anstruther answered. "If there did not happen to be a disparity in age of something like thirty years, and if Forrest were not a confirmed hypochondriac and, in spite of poor Adelaide, a confirmed old bachelor."

"Let us say at once," said Sarah Burchell, "a confirmed old maid! But you forget, Richard, there is the attraction of opposites. If Mr. Forrest's a fretful, complaining, delicate creature, Theo's the very embodiment of life, health and energy—mental and physical. I remember at the dance you gave here when she came out his remarking how well-bred she looked: and there are one or two other trifles I've put down in my memory. I've a straight eye for character, ignorant as I may be about everything else—and, as I have said, poor Mr. Forrest is just in the stage when men do marry anybody who is good to them—their cook, or their wife's plainest friend—anyone, in fact, human and handy."

Anstruther kicked a log in the fire impatiently: as it lustily spurted, he said, "And what about Theo's feelings, pray? and the trifling fact that she is engaged to some one else?"

"Whom she cares for—not that," Miss Burchell rejoined, snapping her fingers; "and who she knows cares for her—not that," and she snapped them again. "I've always said she was marrying simply to secure a vantage ground—for

her schemes—her noble and philanthropic schemes, *bien entendu*. She will soon see that as Mrs. Forrest of Inglethorpe Place she will have immeasurably better opportunities than as Mrs. David King of the Priory. We all know that she loves power, and patronising her neighbours—ay, and money too, for that is power—though I know she doesn't want it for the vulgar follies of a silly woman. The disparity in age doesn't matter, as Theo informed me once she had an old head on young shoulders, and I informed her that, like Boz, I never saw that unnatural combination without a strong desire to knock it off. Theo will do very well, Richard: and, with my hand on my heart, I believe she will make Archibald Forrest a happier man than he has ever been in his life."

"In fact, Sarah," says Anstruther, at his most sardonic, "you are a disinterested, benevolent creature, with Forrest's and Theo's interests as dear and near to you—as the other pair's. I suppose, while I'm carrying out your nefarious schemes here, King and Nancy are to be enjoying the moon and the nightingales in your garden at Ferry Cottage, while you sit upstairs in the parlour with your eyes carefully closed."

Mis Burchell dismissed these sarcasms with a movement of her hand. "Of course, David King must go away," she said. "Out of sight, out of Theo's mind, or only in it to contrast unfavourably with the gallant attentions of the Squire. I assure you, Richard, David has not paid Theo any gallant attentions lately—if ever. I'll arrange about him. Well!" she looked up at the clock. "It's getting late." She rose, fastened her shawl, and stood facing her cousin—as tall as he, with their eyes on a level.

"Mind, Sarah," he said, still irritably, "I make no promises. I'll have the man here—a nice time I shall have of it—but as to my forcing him to fall in love with Theo—that's ridiculous. And how can you be perfectly certain, if he did, that Nancy and King would be happy together?"

"Ay, there's the rub!" Sarah Burchell answered thoughtfully, staring at the fire. "It's impossible to be *perfectly* certain—about anything! But I think so! I think so!"

After a minute, in a much softer and warmer tone than she generally used, and as if she pleaded with him, she said, "Richard! It would be as great a satisfaction to you as it would be to me if we could get for Nancy what so many of us miss?"

He made some grumbling answer, which she seemed to understand. For she said, still in the same low voice, "Thank you, Richard. I am grateful"; added prosaically, "My cloak and clogs are in the hall," and shook hands with him.

Benson was in the hall to assist Miss Burchell into her ancient covering with as much deference as if it had been ermine and she a duchess, for Anstruther had as well-drilled servants as any man in the county.

He came out of the hall door with his guest, and looking up at a sky full of broken clouds hurrying over the moon, for it had ceased raining and a little wind blew, said, "Clearing at last!"

"We'll hope so!" says Sarah Burchell, turning her head to nod to him as she strode briskly down the drive.

Where the road from the Priory joined the road to Ferry Cottage, she met David King bringing a note from his mother. He walked on with her to the Cottage, and came in quietly, as a matter of course. Nancy was making the tea, with a little fat kettle singing cosily over the fire.

As Miss Burchell entered, she said, "Here's David, Nancy, come to ask you and me to dine with Mrs. King to-morrow, as she will be alone. You will spoil our middle-aged confidences, so you must refuse."

Getting a cup for David out of the old corner cupboard (where her aunt's best china was kept at once for use and ornament), Nancy asked, "You are going to Newcastle?"

King replied, "For two or three days; I shall get done in that, I think."

And Miss Burchell rejoined, "I should have thought two or three weeks would have been nearer the mark!"

Directly she had gone upstairs to divest herself of shawl and bonnet, Nancy, with the old tortoise-shell tea-caddy in one hand, took hold of David's sleeve with the other.

"Davie!" she whispered, with her eyes very bright, "*why* does Sal want you to be away two or three weeks?"

King answered, "I'm sure I don't know. Does she?"

Nancy shook her head—sagely. "Sal has something up her sleeve," she said, still almost in a whisper. "I *knew* she had!" and she began measuring the tea in the caddy spoon absently.

"That's five you've put in," says King presently, laying a large hand over hers. "We shan't sleep for a week! *What* can she possibly have up her sleeve?"

Again Nancy shook her head, in the denial, not of one who does not know, but of one who does not mean to say. Then she went to the fire, and, kneeling by it, put the kettle on it, and looked up at King, standing above her. "It is a good omen—the name of the ship!" she said, still almost in a whisper. "Nothing can make me dismal when I think of that! And in one of Sal's books I read once, '*Ce qu'on diffère est à demi rompu*'"; and she translated for his benefit, whose brief education had not included French, "Postponed is half abandoned."

"Nancy," he said, in that recalling voice she knew—the voice that roused—from dreams, "Theo doesn't mean to abandon it! and my obligations will be the same next month as they are this. After all, you know"—as he spoke, as if to soften his words, he took one of her bright curls and wound it round his finger with exactly the gesture his mother used so often—"the name is only a coincidence."

But Nancy had heard Miss Burchell's firm tread on the

stairs, and drawing away her head from beneath his hand, she took up the kettle and went on with her tea-making.

As the three of them were drinking it, Miss Burchell asked the names of a few Forrest relatives whom she had noted at the funeral, and added, "I suppose they will all be leaving the Place to-morrow?"

King said, "Most of them have left already. It will be pretty dismal for old Archibald in that great house alone."

"Oh, well, as a matter of fact," Miss Burchell said casually, "I believe my cousin Anstruther intends asking Mr. Forrest to spend a week or two with him." For her own delectation she added, "Richard is so thoughtful and unselfish in insisting on doing little things like that!"

And she became aware of Nancy's very intelligent and considering eyes fixed on her face.

The next day, if the weather was not yet suitable for love among the roses in Anstruther's garden, it had so far improved that, when they had dined, Miss Burchell and Mrs. King sat in the drawing-room at the Priory with the windows open and, to avoid the certainty of moths and the horrid possibility of bats, did not light the candles. Without, in the quiet garden, "night laid her velvet hand upon day's face": and within, the two ladies chatted quietly on all subjects except the one nearest to both their hearts, until the clock chiming ten—in Inglethorpe the inevitable hour of departure—Sarah Burchell said, suddenly and very impressively:

"Now, my dear Mrs. King, can you keep your own counsel?"

To which Camilla replied, with great readiness and fervour, "Oh yes, Miss Burchell, indeed I can!" Then, in a minute or two, and in quite a different voice, "At least, I *think* I can"; and, sighing slightly, added, "Sometimes, of course, the things one least wishes to say seem to slip out by themselves!"

Miss Burchell, who perfectly understood how aggravating and endearing Captain King must have found his wife, rejoined briskly, "Well, what I am going to say must not slip out—for David's sake"; and as briefly as might be she told Mrs. King of the proposal she had made to Anstruther the evening before.

The pretence that David was still attached to his *fiancée* Mrs. King dropped as readily as one sets down a heavy weight: all she said was, with that simplicity and shrewdness which are so often found blended, "But it will be *very* difficult to get Davie to go away, for he will want to be here to see everything of Nancy he possibly can!"

Sarah Burchell rejoined, reflecting, "And we shall have to find a good plausible reason for getting him away, to satisfy Theo. That young woman is no fool—I wish she were! No, I don't! It's not at all easy to fool a fool: people can be too simple to be easily taken in"; and she continued her reflections.

Presently she said, rather impatiently, "What about that little what's-his-name? with the telescope—at Tottenham? Couldn't you get him to ask David to spend a few weeks there—on the plea he's old and ailing and will be dead before David gets back from his next voyage? He must be very far from young"—here Miss Burchell succumbed, as it were, to the plausible and enticing nature of the plan—"and of course he's got something or another the matter with him. Yes, that will do! Write to him and tell him to write to David at once."

Camilla said timidly, "Only James Gilmour is, unfortunately, *most* robust, dear Miss Burchell, and never ails in the least!"

Miss Burchell sniffed—said, "Humph! Very stupid of him," and relapsed into thought. Then she looked up with, "You are a very delicate woman now. Can't you require three weeks' ozone at Hastings or Brighton?"

But Camilla, "stung by the splendour of a sudden

thought," put her hand on Miss Burchell's brown silk knee with, "There is Mary-Ann! Poor Mary-Ann! I had a sad letter from her a little time ago; *she is very* far from well; and *so* devoted to Davie, since he was quite a baby! She would love to have him."

"The very thing!" said Miss Burchell, who had hitherto hardly realised Miss King's existence. "Write to her at once and tell her to ask David to stay for two or three weeks. She must not forget to mention her health because he won't want to go, and he will feel obliged to go—out of duty. Your son is absolutely obsessed by it, ma'am. She must insist on two or three weeks, for we can't hope to bring Mr. Forrest to the point in anything less."

In a moment Mrs. King said, in a very uncertain voice, rather low, "I'm afraid that won't do, after all! Dear Mary-Ann is never pleased with anything *I* propose. The fact of the matter is—" and Mrs. King entered into a long and rambling history, from which Miss Burchell deduced that the sisters-in-law had fallen out, not only on the memorable visit and the temperature of little Davie's bath water, but on every other possible opportunity, and on subjects ranging from Captain King's ability or inability to digest rabbit-pie to Mrs. King's non-attendance at Sunday afternoon service. Camilla finished with a small sigh, and added, "In fact, though Mary-Ann and I are always the best of friends"—meaning they decidedly were not—"if *I* wrote and asked her to ask David, it would be the very thing to make her say she couldn't."

"I must then, I suppose!" says Sarah Burchell. "Give me her address. On the whole, I think it will be the best to tell her the truth, or something like the truth. Honesty's the best policy—at least, it is generally—if you are politic in the use of it. She's devoted to David, you say, and rather a clever woman?"

And Camilla sighed so very deeply as she answered, "Oh! *very* clever," and had evidently suffered so grievously under

that cleverness, that Miss Burchell laughed as she kissed her good-bye, saying:

"Well, few people do such silly things as clever women. I only hope I am not trying to be one myself!"

As she walked home through the silent village—lying in moonlight, with scarcely a leaf stirring, and looking much more peaceful and innocent than any place actually could be—she recalled the words of the wise man, "Most of the mischief in the world would never happen if men would only be content to sit still in their parlours": and her own lifelong principle, "Have your own business—*and mind it.*"

Yet, after all, to get for what one loves best what is best worth having in this vain world, one may well sacrifice scruples and theory. And she trudged home in her old clogs, the brown silk gown turned up over her plain petticoat, with the firm step of one who means to reach a goal.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SNARE IS BROKEN

FOUR days later, Mary-Ann King coming down to breakfast in her little house at Plymouth was startled and agitated to see on her plate a stout letter, directed in a handwriting unknown to her, and bearing the Inglethorpe postmark.

She was startled because she lived a life so solitary and narrow and so little in touch with the outside world, that she had not three correspondents in it; and agitated because a highly nervous organisation caused her instantly to arrive at the cheerful conclusion that, as the writing was not the silly little Italianate hand Camilla affected (affected was the word Mary-Ann preferred, as true in a double sense) nor David's neat characters, it must be from some stranger deputed to acquaint her with the death of both.

Miss King was, of course, at sixty-five what she had been at forty, when she had so sorely tried the patience of her brother and his wife—that is to say, she was a woman of a good deal of character and sense, and of a most warm and generous heart. But she was also of domineering temper, and determined to make her rule of conduct the rule for everybody, while she avenged the slights and humiliations of Fate by an exaggerated self-esteem. Plain, old and poor, there was no reason why her equals should seek her society; and they did not seek it. She was too proud to mix with her inferiors. And so, like hundreds of thousands of women then, and not a very few now, she lived a life so cheerless and uneventful that its only interest was the small household

tasks which she "saved" her elderly Martha, and its only distraction an occasional duty call from the clergy of the parish.

No wonder the affections, dammed up all her life in her solitary heart, had poured themselves out upon David. She may be said to have lived for a month on one of his brief and bald epistles—for he was certainly no Chesterfield; and, though he steadily liked and was grateful to her, could by no manner of means have told her so; while it was certainly well for his peace of mind that he never knew how she sat fireless through bleak Mays and dripping Septembers that she might add a solid silver cream-jug to the teapot and spoons waiting her demise, and David's acceptance, in the hair trunk.

She sat now for full ten minutes staring at the missive, and not daring to open it. When at last with trembling hand she had broken the seal, her tea and bacon cooled unheeded at her side, and she read it, re-read it, and read it again.

Sarah Burchell, as she had told Anstruther, did know something about human nature, and had planked, so to speak, not only on Mary-Ann's being exceedingly fond of her godson, but also of the power and importance she had never had. The letter conveyed to Miss King that she, and she alone, could do great things to help David, whose hands were bound in honour not to help himself; and she remembered—or fancied she did—that, when David had visited her in the early days of his engagement, he had exhibited none of the fervour of a lover, and that she had always had the remarkable perspicacity to dislike and distrust, without ever having seen her, the young woman he was engaged to.

When Martha was removing the breakfast and asking, with the inconvenient familiarity of the old servant, if something had upset her in her letter, Mary-Ann, with shaking hands and an excited flush on her cheeks, was already answering it—not to Miss Burchell—but to David, at an address in Newcastle which Miss Burchell had given with

perfect explicitness and the reminder that there was no time to lose.

With shawl and bonnet pinned on less precisely than ever before in her life, Miss King hurried to the coach office and posted the letter herself—feeling the glowing sensation of being a person of real importance engaged upon secret diplomacy of a momentous character; and presently, as she sat alone—dressing a large pincushion in tarlatan and blue satin petticoats for David's bedroom—had to wipe away a tear of sympathy when she thought of the rough weather through which her dear boy must have passed, and of gratitude to Heaven that she should be the chosen vessel (her metaphors seemed a little mixed, but, after all, confined themselves to the male King's natural element) to bring him into port.

The post from Newcastle to Plymouth was no hurried business in those days; but somehow Miss King did not doubt that David would fail her, even had she laid no stress on her failing health. In fact, at the end of the week, a brief missive announced his pleasure in accepting her invitation, though, as his business in Newcastle was proving to take much longer than he had expected, his visit to her could not exceed ten days. After it, he proposed to return straight to Newcastle, bring his boat down to London, to load there a general cargo for the Mediterranean, and then to return to Inglethorpe for his wedding with Miss Heywood, and to take the briefest possible of honeymoons before he sailed.

This letter preceded his arrival only by forty-eight hours, which were among the happiest and busiest of Miss King's life, and kept her mentally so fully occupied that, when David arrived, on a splendid July evening, as tanned of cheek and as sea-blue of eye as ever, and said, as he put down his bag on the door-step and kissed her, "I'm sorry to hear such a bad account of you, Aunt Mary!" she felt, poor soul, the *malade imaginaire* she certainly was not.

A great trouble in one's own soul commonly makes one very unobservant of the ordinary trifles of life; but the generosity

of her preparations—it is only the very poor who are really lavish in hospitality—did make its way, through all his pre-occupations, to David's mind. Out of gratitude, he ate at all meals during his visit much more than he really required, and the candid Martha, who always joined in the conversation when she brought in the dishes, presented to him a picture of a larder ridiculously overflowing and of a kitten "fair scared" by beholding two shillings' worth of cream delivered at a door which had never previously admitted more than two pennyworth. Also, that night, through his pre-occupations, and a conscientious endeavour to seem to have none, he perceived his aunt's eyes fixed curiously on him as they sat at their tea in her little parlour; and the next morning at breakfast, when a letter from Theo lay on his plate, more curiously still.

King scanned it rapidly. It was indeed shorter than Theo's letters were wont to be, and contained less allusion than usual to Work—with the largest W in the compositor's compository. A sentence at the end—"Mama and I dined last night at the rectory, where, as I expect you know, poor Mr. Forrest is staying. He is still much depressed"—he read aloud, with one or two others equally suited for publicity.

Miss King said, with studied nonchalance, "Mr. Forrest is an interesting and attractive kind of man, I suppose?"

And when David replied, with the cheerful candour of youth, "Oh! not a bit of it! He's an ugly old party with a bald head," she saw that the plan in Miss Burchell's mind had never entered his.

King had not thought he minded poverty. For himself, he did not mind it now. But after a few days in that narrow house, and of his aunt's cramped and trivial life, a sort of horror of it grew upon him—for Nancy. For he saw, or thought he saw, that if it compels one to be busy, it also cruelly robs one of scope for action; and that the un-graces of his aunt's character—her dogmatism and self-sufficiency—came less from her nature, than from the nature of her life.

As she sat opposite him in those long, light evenings, proudly preened in a cashmere shawl and a large oval brooch of his own presenting, he remembered how lightly he had given them—and forgotten her; and the tragedy of caring much—perhaps best in the world—for someone who gives you a dozen careless thoughts in as many months, weighed on him, like a shame.

Every evening, he gave her his arm and they strolled for an hour—as it were, under the eyes of all Plymouth—on the Hoe. Even to his modesty, her pride and pleasure in his escort were manifest; and when one evening they met the rector of the church Miss King attended, and his wife, King overheard his career and character being described in terms so ornate that he hardly recognised himself.

He had arrived a tired man: brain and body had both been hard at work in the north; and for a few days nature and youth had their way and he slept at night the instant and dreamless sleep which does indeed “knit up the ravelled sleeve of care,” and enable one to present a decently cheerful and animated appearance at breakfast. But, after a few days, the rest and idle life told: he lay awake hour after hour, listening to the thud, thud, of the waves on the beach, until every object in the poor little bedroom grew defined and clear—the petticoated pincushion, the text over the mantelpiece, Miss King’s earliest sampler, and a water-colour sketch of his grandmother, largely sleeve and head-dress and a very little of a pale lady fading away in the midst of them.

At last King rose, let himself quietly out of the house, went down to the beach and walked there till morning. *He* would have at least his chosen profession, the incalculable blessing of a clear, definite and absorbing duty, to be done whether he was happy or wretched. But for Nancy there would be only a makeshift—a better makeshift indeed than poor Mary-Ann King’s by so much as Nancy had a better mind and up-bringing—but a makeshift still.

It was such a very grave and preoccupied young man who faced Miss King over the tea-urn that morning, that her warm heart ached for him. At eleven o'clock, she conveyed to him with her own hands a glass of port, as he was mending Martha's meat-safe for her in the back premises—thereby rousing him to a guilty sense of his own gloominess and taciturnity.

With his neat sailor fingers he had soon repaired everything in her little house that required reparation, and presently turned his attention to the untidy patch at the back of it, which Miss King, not being able to squeeze even the wage of a one-day-a-week gardener out of the pittance on which she lived, alluded to as "my wilderness" with a wave of the hand and an airy laugh which deceived no one. King therefore, having borrowed implements from the retired sea-captain next door, in time caused the wilderness, if not to blossom like the rose, at least to become suitable soil for some useful vegetables and hardy flowers.

Every day now Miss King hurried downstairs expecting to find a letter from Miss Burchell telling her Fate had yielded—and every day there was nothing.

Once, she ventured to say to her nephew, in rather a shaking voice, "Your wedding has been twice postponed—I should never wonder if it were postponed again!"

Whereon David raised his grave eyes to her face and said, "I should, though"; and went on with his breakfast.

No doubt if Miss King, being quite as impulsive as she was warm—not to say hot—hearted, had been able to give slow Fate what may be called (but what *she* never would have called) a shove, she would have done it and spoilt everything. As it was, she worried herself into a series of nervous headaches; and was trying to cure one by resting in her darkened parlour one hot afternoon, when King's visit had only four more days to run, and he was working on her patch with the borrowed tools and his coat off.

As he leant on his spade to rest for a few minutes, Martha

appeared from the house, holding a letter unceremoniously between finger and thumb; and saying, with a most ill-timed pleasantry, "I expect it's from your young lady, so you'll be in a hurry to get it!" thrust the missive into his hands. They were dirty as well as busy, and he had half a mind to put the letter into his pocket and let it wait; then something made him change his mind, and he broke the black seal and began reading, perfunctorily.

"BEECH HOUSE,
"INGLETHORPE, KENT.

"MY DEAR DAVID,

"I hope you found Miss King better than you expected. Knowing how glad she would be to see you, I was of course glad to spare you to her. You have been such a generous and devoted nephew to her, it is not wonderful she should be fond of you."

("Why this so handsome pat on the back?" thought King; and read on.)

"Since you have been away," continued Miss Heywood (in a new paragraph and a caligraphy much neater and more careful than usual), "I have been thinking very seriously of our relative positions, and in particular of a conversation we had in the summer-house here in May. I am sure you will not have forgotten that I could not then agree with you that our mutual affection was not strong enough to make it certain our marriage would be a happy one. Lately, I have reconsidered the whole subject in all its bearings, and I feel that, after all, you were right, and that we are not in all respects absolutely suited. Our aims *are* very different. I must confess, I should like the active help and countenance of my husband in my work for my poorer brethren, and that, wrongly or rightly, I do not feel that looking after his house and darning his socks can be quite the be-all and end-all of my life. You are devoted to your employment, so should the more readily understand you can-

not be the whole of mine." (The writer had been pleased with this sentence, feeling it terse, logical and epigrammatic.) "I should be indeed sorry to give you pain, but I know you will find much consolation in your new ship, and I hope, in course of time, may find some one who will more nearly approach your ideal of wifehood than would be possible in my case. If you agree, we will say that our engagement has been broken by mutual consent: directly I hear from you, I will tell my mother and friends of our decision. I think there should be as little delay as possible as August 17th is so near. I shall return my engagement ring and the other presents you have so kindly given me, to the Grey Priory. There is no reason that I know of why we should feel any embarrassment in meeting, and I hope we may continue to do so from time to time; but it is perhaps fortunate for us both that your duties will shortly take you abroad for some months.

"With sincerest good wishes,—I am, Yours very truly,
"THEODORA HEYWOOD."

Without re-reading it, and without the slightest hesitation or the slightest hurry, King put the momentous missive in his waistcoat pocket; consulted the silver watch; took a second's thought; then, attracting the attention of the mariner over the wall by saying, "Hi! you there, Mr. Brown?" returned Mr. Brown's spade and pitchfork, with thanks; and, pulling on his coat, went into the house.

Miss King was still in the dining-room, with her eyes and the shutters closed. If no fool, neither was she a particularly observant woman, and the room was dark; but the moment her nephew entered it she felt, as she often said afterwards, a change of atmosphere.

He said, quickly and directly, "Aunt Mary! I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, but I've had a letter—which has altered all my plans." Having opened a shutter, he briefly told her a story she knew already; with the sequel she did not know.

She got up from her chair, put both her hands on his

shoulders, kissed him, and exclaimed, "My *dear* boy!" drying her eyes. It was, justly, a matter of self-congratulation to her for the rest of her life that she never, by word or sign, revealed to him that Miss Burchell had revealed anything to her. She did permit herself the comment, "I always felt that Miss Heywood was quite unworthy of you!"

David answered at once, "On the other hand, I expect it's I who am quite unworthy of her!" and Miss King saw, and respected, the line he intended to take.

Once more looking at his watch, he added, "You're so awfully good to me, Aunt Mary, I know you won't mind if I leave you at once—so that I can catch to-morrow's early mail from Exeter. The fact of the matter is, I want to get back to Inglethorpe as soon as I can—just for one night—so that I can arrange to marry Nancy before I sail—which I shall now do as soon as possible—and take her with me to the Mediterranean."

There fortunately happened to be a chair just behind Miss King, on which she sank with a gasp. This was life indeed—after lifelong stagnation! David was a different man from the sombre and heavy-laden one who had faced her at breakfast. Looking about, he detected the wine cupboard, and, with the keys which he retrieved from a bead bag Miss King had dropped on the floor, he revived her with a glass of sherry. She signed to him to take one himself. As he put down the glass, he said, "I must go and see about the postchaise—I must post to Exeter, and I haven't too much time. I'll be back in ten minutes"—and he was gone.

Miss King sat staring at her glass, hazy with sherry—feeling herself hazy, but not with wine.

As King bowled along the Exeter road in the postchaise, in a keen breeze and a bright sun, he breathed deep, as a man breathes who has come out of prison: and looked round him, with new eyes on a new world. For he was not only free, but with a clear conscience. Characteristically, he did

not trouble *why* Theo wanted to have done with him: it was enough she did want it, of her own free will. He had been a glum beast and she was tired of him; or perhaps—why not?—her reasons were simply the reasons she gave. What did they matter? He, King, had doggedly kept his word: if she had held him to it, would have kept it, to the best of his ability, for life.

And now he was going back to marry Nancy—at once.

At Pople's, that excellent hostelry of Exeter, he ordered breakfast, together with pens, ink and paper, in the coffee-room. That apartment—which it seems to be a religion with English inns to keep as gloomy and uninviting as possible—no more looked its best in the dim early morning than a plain woman looks her best after being up all night at a ball. But if it was unswept, undusted and unaired, and the waiter cross, dishevelled and but imperfectly awake, to this traveller defects mattered nothing. Ugliness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. In ten minutes, King had pushed away the breakfast tray and taken up his pen; gazed out of the window; reflected; indited "My dear Theo," and reflected again. Then, as one who says Neck or Nothing! he took the plunge.

"MY DEAR THEO,

"I was very glad to have your letter yesterday and to hear that you have broken off our engagement, as I am sure we were not at all suited and shall be ever so much happier apart."

Here the writer paused, and again gazed out of the window, stroking his chin with the quill. Re-reading his effusion, he became aware of its indecent joyfulness, tore it up, and began again.

"MY DEAR THEO,

"Your letter reached me yesterday. I am sure you are quite right. We should never have fitted as husband and

wife; but, as you say, there isn't any reason why we should not see each other as friends. It certainly will be better, however, if I am not much in Inglethorpe for the present: so I shall just come down and see my mother and be off again. Don't bother about returning my presents—unless you would rather—just as you like. Please give my love to Mrs. Heywood, and tell her I am uncommonly sorry to have given her worry and trouble: she was always very good to me. Hoping you will have the best of luck all through life.

“Yours very sincerely,

“DAVID KING.”

It is remarkable, but a fact, that King was very fairly satisfied with this bald and tactless missive: he folded it with the brisk cheerfulness of one who has performed, *tant bien que mal*, a distasteful duty, and having sealed it, had another cup of coffee and a piece of toast. If he had felt Theo was hurt and sore, that would have been a different matter altogether. But she was obviously as anxious to give him his *congé* as he was to take it. *Congé!* that was the word indeed. The holiday feeling was in all the air: in the streets of the old country town, just waking to life and work; in the faces of the office-boys taking down the shutters; and of the maid-servants washing the steps. King kept all his life a fondness for that Cathedral city, which he was actually simple enough to think had something to do with its merits.

When he reached the coach office, every seat on the London mail was taken; and King, who had never been lavish though he had always been generous—for the days when every sixpence had had to do the work of two were not yet far away—found himself recklessly bribing a young gentleman to give up his place—the young gentleman yielding less, perhaps, to the bribe than to the surprisingly sudden and determined nature of the onslaught.

Exeter was eighteen and a half hours by coach from Lon-

don in those times, and a fine ride it was. The August day was without a cloud: almost every man, when the "Swift" (well named) reached London at midnight, had had a day's pleasure and exhilaration; and if King had not been desperately eager to get to his destination, he would have enjoyed the getting there as much as his neighbours.

He slept in the dingy inn where the coach set down her passengers, and was early astir on the morrow, going first to a wine-merchant in Water Lane (hard by the church of St. Dunstan-in-the-East, where his parents had been married), and giving a handsome order to be sent to Plymouth, and afterwards to a jeweller—an excellent firm, still to be found in an unobtrusive shop in St. Swithin's Lane, City—where he bought a little ring with an emerald in the midst of five fat pearls—the ring, like the firm of jewellers, subsisting still.

Then he took the morning mail to Dartford. This time he had it almost to himself. There was not even a talkative old gentleman, as there had been on that memorable spring day when King had come to see his inheritance for the first time. He recalled this morning how doubtful he had felt of its advantages—how he had dimly suspected it menaced that work in the world chosen for him by himself and by nature. Well, in bringing him to Theo, it *had* menaced it. Had it, though, really, for even a moment?

The great octopus, London, had comparatively short tentacles ninety years ago: there were gardens between Lambeth and Southwark; and where now is a mighty labyrinth of sordid streets, were fields and flowers—the scent of the country instead of the taint of the town.

King looked about him—and lo! everything was very good. At last, he could act. Man *was* man—and master of his fate. The vigour and decision of his nature and his training could have play once more, he need no longer sit chained, bound in honour to do nothing, a captive debarred from striking one blow to free himself. "Wait—Hope—Wait"

may be a perfect counsel, but to youth it is also a counsel of perfection. To King, too, waiting had so nearly meant seeing slip away not only his own happiness—but Nancy's. Even now, he had a fear in him Fate might cheat him of her at the last moment. The "Commodore" was slow this morning, surely, and old Cholmeley half asleep! But, after all, it is not a blind destiny such men as David King believe in, but that Hand of God which, for once it slays, a hundred times brings men to the haven where they would be.

The coach had barely pulled up at the "Bull and George" before King had slipped off it, retrieved his bag from the boot, and, after a quick look round lest by any chance Nancy should be shopping in the town, turned brisk steps in the direction of Inglethorpe.

The road was dusty and the sun still high. But it was not on these accounts that, as he came into Inglethorpe, King turned into the copse. It was as cool and fairylike as it had been on that morning, three months ago, when he had found Nancy there and told her that Theo, like Shylock, would hold to her pound of flesh. Turning a corner he saw, without surprise—for Fortune does sometimes come with both hands full—Nancy herself, in the old cotton frock patterned with washed-out rosebuds and the sunburnt straw bonnet tied by a blue ribbon. The mossy grass of the path made his footsteps inaudible. He was beside her before she knew it, and taking tight hold of her arm, said suddenly in a deep voice:

"Nancy! it *was* an omen!"

It was not until nearly half an hour later—one of the happiest and shortest half hours of any two lives—as they sat on a bank in the depth of the glade, with the voice of the little stream, and the distant sound of a man sawing wood in the village half a mile from them, accompanying their speech or their silence, that—coming back to practical things with a long sigh—Nancy asked:

"Did Theo say why—she didn't want any more of you?"

King, who had almost forgotten the text of Theo's letter—so much worthier a composition than his own—replied, "Oh, she said she had come to my way of thinking—and that we weren't suited"; and Nancy, attentively contemplating the toes of her shoes, perceived that *cherchez l'homme* was a point of view that had not occurred to him.

He added, "The reason doesn't matter. Only I don't want to hurt her feelings by showing myself in Inglethorpe now; nor, of course, by saying anything about our engagement before we need. My plan is that I go up to Newcastle to-morrow, bring 'The Nancy' down to London, get in my crew and cargo, and then (that will be in about a week's time) we can be married quietly by special license, and I shall take you straight to the Mediterranean with me for our honeymoon."

"Will you?" says Nancy, with a slight gasp. "Are you ordering or asking me?"

"You can call it which you like," King replied, with a twinkle in his eye. "Anyway, you are coming! The best plan will be for Miss Burchell to bring you up to town next week to some hotel (you can say here you are going to stay with friends) and then you can get a few clothes or anything you will want. Not that you will want any new clothes—unless it's a warm cloak; and that old one you wear in the winter will do all right. There won't be any fuss and festivities and presents—that's one blessing; and we need not say anything now to anyone but my mother—and old Anstruther, as he's your guardian. Perhaps he would come up and marry us. And when Miss Burchell comes back here, when we have sailed, she can tell Theo first, and then everybody else. That's the best arrangement, I think! This evening you must bring Miss Burchell down to the Grey Priory and we can get all the details fixed up. I must be off very early to-morrow. Nancy! here's the seal of our—bar-

gain"—and after some fumbling in his pockets he produced the pearl and emerald ring.

The half-hour slipped into another. The wood-cutter finished his sawing, and the brook, which moves

"the sweet forget-me-nots
Which grow for happy lovers,"

chattered over its pebbles unheeded. The sun was perceptibly lower when King and Nancy parted, at the end of the copse, and King turned his steps to the Priory, alone.

If his mother had not been so much astonished—quite, in fact, to the point of *sal volatile* and nearly to that of tears—to see him walk suddenly into the drawing-room when she supposed him at Plymouth, he might have been struck by her being so very little astonished by the news he had to give her.

Presently, as he twisted the worn wedding-ring on her thin finger, he said, looking up at her, "Now you must stay here! I'll put Ivy Chimneys up to be let."

But she shook her head. He was the wiser, but not always the wiser; and her memory told her how irksome she and Henry would have found the dearest of mothers in the long honeymoon which preceded David's birth.

So she said, with a smile, and, for her, decidedly, "No, no! Susan and I shall be much better in Ivy Chimneys. Nancy won't grudge your coming to see me, because she will know just what I feel—and will feel just like it one day herself."

For twenty minutes, while his mother was resting before dinner, King paced the gravel path in front of the old house. The lowering sun flooded the grey walls with rosy light: there had been so much rain that "August's panting heart of fire" had not scorched the lawns nor turned the trees to the

golds and reds of magnificent decay: the fields which sloped to the river were still green; and in the air was summer in her warmth and prime, not summer in the first chillness of middle age, damp earth and colder nights.

He turned presently and looked at his Priory. "Il y a des lieux que l'on admire; il y a des autres qui touchent et où l'on aimerait à vivre," said La Bruyère. This was one of "les autres qui touchent." Often and often in dreams—for they can as easily defy probability as they can outstrip reality—King had seen Nancy there, and their children. He could leave them under those stout grey walls—while he did his business in great waters—as under the protection of a friend. And when your house is as something human to you, it is really your home.

King, who did not think about his thoughts as the self-conscious do, hardly formulated these, perhaps. But he knew his lot had fallen to him in a fair ground.

Then his mother came out, and with her arm slipped into his, they strolled a few minutes longer in the rich sunseting: he perceived, though she said much less than usual, that she was happy in his happiness, first for himself, and then, not in spite of its recalling, but because it recalled, her own.

As they turned to go into the house to dinner, she said meditatively, "I must show Nancy exactly what I put in your sea-chest, and tell her about the thin shirts Sue is making you for hot climates." She added with a little laugh, "*Nancy* will look after you! *She* will think that is her—Work!"

Nancy certainly seemed to be under that delusion as she and Mrs. King talked together that evening in the Priory drawing-room, while Miss Burchell plucked a crow (her own expression) with David under the stillness of the stars in the garden.

She did not speak, and he waited for her to begin, until they had taken a couple of turns up and down in front of the windows. Then she said, "If we stay here, you will be always trying to see what Nancy is doing inside instead of

attending to me! We will go down to the river"—and they went.

It was not until they had reached the low wall which separated the Priory meadows from the shore, and at the spot where King had first, and often since, met the reprobate Sowerby, that Miss Burchell looked up at her companion, and said:

"Well, I suppose you know that your proceedings are most irregular? Still, so far as I have had any official intimation to the contrary, pledged to Theo, you meet my niece for twenty minutes surreptitiously in a wood, engage yourself to her, propose to marry her in a week, and to take her in a cargo boat for six months to the Mediterranean. What about being off with the old love before you are on with the new? What about settlements? What about aunts and guardians? What about the chatter in the village? What about Theo's *amour propre* when she hears of your indecent haste to take advantage of your freedom? Yet, I suppose you have thought of these things, as I don't take you to be one of the impetuously selfish kind—all for love and the world well lost—which means all the love for yourself and everybody else's world, comfort and right to consideration—pitched overboard. I suit my similes to my company. Now, what have you to say for yourself?"

King surprised Miss Burchell by counter-attacking without the slightest hesitation. He laughed and tried to see her face in the gathering darkness as he said, "Well, it was you, Miss Burchell, who told me I was a fool to stick to my word—circumstances alter cases, etc., etc., and I believe you said a good bit to Theo to discourage her from marrying me. I know she told me you were very interfering! I own it seems rather sudden my being engaged to Nancy—but it isn't a bit. We made up our minds ever so long ago that, if we could, we would. And there hasn't been any time to come and ask you formally. But I believe I can make Nancy happy—and that you can trust her with me. We want each

other—and we want the same things in life. That's the best beginning. Of course I know she might have married anyone——”

(Here Sarah Burchell, who never lied to herself, be-thought her, “Well, she might have married Moor or that simpleton of a Clutterbuck, but I don't see who else at the moment.”)

“—and as to the settlements, it's a case of with all my worldly goods I thee endow—which seems simple enough.”

“Until we have in the lawyers to complicate it, as we are bound to do in honour,” Miss Burchell rejoined. Then, “I live chiefly on an annuity, you know. Richard Anstruther has very generous intentions of leaving Nancy well provided for by his Will. But, as those lawyers will tell you, promises are piecrust. He may be left a widower any day, marry a girl of twenty and have a dozen children: or change his mind. So Nancy, practically, hasn't a sixpence.”

“I'm glad of it,” says King—and he was.

“Still,” returned Miss Burchell, “as we are part of a highly complex civilisation, where money is the only medium of exchange and a great deal of it is required to be well fed, clothed, sheltered and educated, I suppose you have no rooted objections to Nancy's prospects of inheriting from the rector being really, despite the lawyers, quite sound ones?”

Miss Burchell said afterwards she was prepared to hear Don Quixote state that he was only marrying Nancy on the conditions that she declined legacies and he paid for ever for her every shoe-string and hair-ribbon.

But he said with a laugh, “Well, since I've had old Uncle Charles' I see there's a good deal to be said for legacies. Certainly there's plenty for Nancy and me to get along on here very comfortably as things are now, but education is very expensive, and I should like to send our boys into the Navy.”

“That's looking ahead,” says Miss Burchell.

And David King replied, with perfect truth and sim-

plicity, "I've looked ahead and seen everything as it might be—it was the only way I could sometimes forget what a fool I'd been to ask Theo to marry me." In a moment, he added, "I should be sorry to hurt what you call her *amour propre*! That's why I want to get away from here as soon as may be; and when we are married, I want you or Mr. Anstruther to tell her before she can possibly hear the news from anyone else."

"Very considerate!" commented Miss Burchell. "Only, wouldn't it be still more considerate to postpone your marriage, and so obviate all idea of being in a hurry to be off with the old love, until your return from the south?"

"No!" says David, with great decision. "No postponement! I shall marry Nancy in a week. And if there isn't time to get the clothes and bonnets, she can't have them. On board ship there's only room for what you really want, not for what you think you want. We shall be married in one of those empty old churches by St. Paul's—so long as we don't light on Canon Norman's!—and go straight on board. I'll take all the care I can of her, and she says she won't mind the inconveniences."

"Mind!" says Miss Burchell. "Mind! Twenty—and a honeymoon on the Mediterranean!" She paused, as if she were lost in thought. "Well, I trust you. I always have, on most inadequate grounds, from the first moment I saw you. But you were on a very wrong tack then, Master David—very wrong indeed!"

As they turned slowly towards the house, King said, "And it's only by sheer good luck I've had a chance of—correcting my bearings."

On which, Sarah Burchell permitted herself a chuckle.

The night was so still and warm that presently Camilla, as well as David, walked homewards with their guests, by the harvest moonlight and the way through the copse—the young pair loitering happily, some way behind the elder.

If the copse was like fairyland by daylight, at night it

looked as if the stroke of a wand, or a bar of music, would wake thousands of the Little People to dance on their beds of moss to the ripple of the stream. Why hurry out of the enchanted land of which few ever have the key and none for long?

Their elders had crossed the high road, which cuts at right angles across the wood and leads from the rectory to Inglethorpe village, before King and Nancy reached it. When they did, they heard approaching steps and voices, and King drew Nancy back into the shadows saying, "As I'm not supposed to be here——"

And in a minute, on the straight, white ribbon of moonlit highway, there appeared three figures—two tall ones well in front of the other. Their voices but not their words reached King and Nancy, and then they beheld, talking earnestly, with a lace scarf carelessly adorning her elegant head, Miss Heywood and—wonder of wonders! Archibald Forrest—heedless of the excessive susceptibility of his larynx and the miasmas of the night air and the river, or only heedful to the extent of a black woollen comforter twisted about his lean throat—while, a few yards behind them, wheezed old Louisa, playing propriety. To anyone aware of the current history of Inglethorpe it was evident that Theo had been dining at the rectory, and that Forrest was escorting her home to Beech House.

When they and the chaperoning Louisa were well past the copse, Nancy gave King's arm a squeeze of infinite meaning, looked up into his face with so much wickedness and *espèglerie* in her own that even his manly density could not fail to understand her, and, while administering yet another quite severe pinch to the arm, said, "Oh! *what* a stupid! *what* an old stupid!"

The epithet seemed to apply equally to King and to Forrest.

CHAPTER XX

RECOMPENSE

ABOUT ten days later, on one of the wettest of wet August mornings, there was a small wedding party at the Church of St. Bene't's, Paul's Wharf—that Wren edifice having been recommended to King by one of the clerks at Doctors' Commons as handy and unobtrusive, and, as it were, dignified and embellished by the fact of "our people having a pew there, sir."

That pew and the one reserved for the College of Arms, and, in fact, all the other pews except one jointly occupied by Miss Burchell and the female pew-opener, were empty. The few monuments which adorn the church exuded tears of damp; the curate looked damp, his surplice was damp; and Anstruther, thoroughly accustomed through life to be warm and comfortable, was wrapped round and round so many times in his neck-shawl that, as his cousin curtly told him, Nancy looked as if she were being given away by a mummy. Only to her and King the text over the communion table announcing "This is the Gate of Heaven" seemed a present and literal truth.

When the ceremony was over and the register signed, the little party of four packed itself into the hackney coach waiting for them (which was already half full of mouldy straw) and were conveyed, in an increasing downpour of cold rain, to one of those excellent old eating-houses of the City, which cooked chops and steaks admirably well, and was famous for its ale, its sherry and its civility.

The landlord, who must have had some species of second-

sight, for no one could have been more simply attired than Nancy, detected a wedding-party, and may have supposed that he detected two; anyhow, he placed the four in what may be termed his smartest box or wooden compartment, and gave the old head-waiter a *coup d'œil* which meant the best sherry at the very best price, and soon had a fire blazing hospitably up his chimney.

Miss Burchell and Nancy had spent a sumptuous week at Long's Hotel in Bond Street—at Anstruther's expense—shopping, also at Anstruther's expense, one of the briefest trousseau that any bride with as many guineas in her netted purse as had Nancy, ever accomplished. But then, being half a Frenchwoman, she knew that to be well-dressed it is quality, not quantity, that counts; bought garments fit, though few; and this morning, in her plain, dark blue pelisse and a straw bonnet, was very likely more suitably and becomingly garbed than any other woman in England at the epoch. To be sure, she was so radiantly happy she would have looked pretty in anything.

King's content far surpassed the words he always found difficult. But a belated pang of conscience made him turn presently to Miss Burchell, as Nancy was talking to Anstruther, and say in rather a low voice, "I'm afraid I'm a selfish brute, taking everything and leaving you nothing"; and the extreme tartness of Miss Burchell's reply, "Well, as I have been scheming and plotting for this very thing ever since I set eyes on you"—revealed to him she felt too much to own to any feeling at all. Then Anstruther proposed the health of bride and bridegroom, and drank it in the brown sherry.

They were to go on board the "Nancy" almost at once, and she was to sail that evening. The bride's modest luggage was already on board. King had thought of everything and acted on his thoughts with a seamanlike celerity. He had spent his week in bringing the "Nancy" down from Newcastle and loading her in London with a cargo of piece goods

brought from the East Indies for transhipment to the Mediterranean, and in engaging his crew. All his work had been done from a deep background of happiness. His very eyes had a different look. He was masterful, determined and not at all afraid—of Fate, or of his own power to make Nancy happy.

As for Nancy, she had no misgiving, except of not proving as good a sailor as she thought she was. There had never been anyone but David. Come what might, she was sure.

They were due on board at one o'clock, so there was no time to loiter over that most modest and satisfactory of wedding breakfasts.

"Besides," thought Sarah Burchell, not grudging, "they won't want *us*!" So presently she drew out her watch and showed it to King, silently.

Anstruther paid the bill and tipped the waiter—Nancy begging an extra half-crown for him, because he looked so fatherly. She knew better than to tell her aunt neither to miss her nor yet to forget her, which is the inconsistent desire of us all, perhaps, when we leave what we love; but urged her to be sure, to be perfectly *sure* to console Ralph and Lavinia—now parlour-boarding with Moor—and not to punish their faults—if they could ever justly be thought to have any faults—with unnecessary severity.

"Nancy thinks I'm a brute," says Sarah Burchell to King in a voice less steady than usual; and Nancy—they had risen and were collecting their things prior to departure—replied, "So you are, Sal, to animals," with a careful lightness.

A coach had been called and was waiting at the door. The rain streamed incessantly, and the driver in his many-caped coat, and the horse, dismal in a horse-cloth, were wet through—and patient from despair.

"Come, Nancy!" says King, with a touch on her shoulder.

As the coach drove off, Anstruther and Miss Burchell,

standing on the glistening pavement, had a last glimpse of Nancy's face, as bright as summer, and of King's, steadily and deeply satisfied.

The cousins drove back at once to Inglethorpe in a continual downpour. But as, in the late afternoon, they neared the village, the clouds broke, a watery and uncertain sun looked through them, and the rain ceased.

Cramped with their long drive, the travellers left the carriage and walked slowly up the last hill. Miss Burchell was one of those persons who have to be very well known to be very well liked; and she certainly took care that few people should know her or the softness and tenderness that lay under her knock-me-down manner; and wore her roughness as a heart-shield.

But this afternoon all her acerbity left her: when Anstruther spoke, she answered briefly and not ungently, until he caught her mood, and a complete and comprehending silence fell between them.

When the chaise drew up at the gate of Ferry Cottage—which revealed outside and at the first glance, as houses do, that it had no one inside it—and the post-boy had taken in the luggage, Anstruther, carrying a bag and parcel or two, followed his cousin upstairs into the parlour.

He looked about: its emptiness struck him, but he said nothing, except, "Shall you be present at the *dénouement*? Of course I shall tell Theo to-night how her young man has consoled himself, and I think her face will be worth seeing"—and Anstruther crowed maliciously.

"I shan't come," Miss Burchell answered. "I thought I should, but I shan't. I'm tired. I've been shopping for a week, and that would wear out Hercules—if he hated it as I do; and one doesn't assist at a runaway match every day—mercifully. Also—there's Moor for me to tackle. It would be brutal he should hear the news from the village. Then I've done with matchmaking for ever and ever." She paused,

and presently added with a smile, slightly grim, "Theo's face *would* be worth seeing; but she would hate me to see it. And, in point of fact, I don't want to seem to gloat. The winner can afford to be magnanimous."

When Anstruther, saying, "Well, as you please!" had left her, she looked about the silent room as he had done; and, muttering to herself, "If I *have* won!" began to set her house in order.

She was putting the sheets on her bed when Moor came up to the parlour with Ralph prancing and barking at his side, and Lavinia with her claws tightly set into his coat, having decided, with the acumen of fourfooted creatures, that as Moor loved her better than Miss Burchell, it was better policy to stay with him if she could.

He was dislodging her when Miss Burchell came in with a pillow-case over her arm.

As she shook hands, she said, "We are immensely beholden to you, Nancy and I, for keeping these creatures for us. If Nancy has left me one direction as to what I am to do, and not to do, for their comfort and well-being, she has left me fifty!"

Moor looked up with his heavy eyes suddenly shrewd and quick.

"Why, where is Nancy?" he said. "Hasn't she come back with you?"

Sarah Burchell put one of her capable hands on his shoulder and looked him in the face as if she challenged him to meet fate and the inevitable like a man.

"No, she hasn't," she said slowly. "Nancy was married to David King in London this morning, and is now on her way to the Mediterranean."

The other bringer of tidings was much more leisurely in his methods, and enjoyed his rôle much more, Anstruther always having in him something of the tease and tormentor, and—compassionate as he could be for real suffering—tak-

ing an unholy joy in making those writhe and wriggle who deserved to.

He had found even less difficulty than Sarah Burchell had anticipated in getting Forrest to come and stay at the rectory; and the white and gold dessert service had not been needed as a bribe, for the poor man was at first too miserable to care what became of him: then found comfort in telling Anstruther how comfortless he was and how greatly his afflictions exceeded other people's: at first, resented Mrs. and Miss Heywood's presence as an interruption to those confidences, until he found that Theo, too, could listen.

Presently, as foreseen, her superabundant vitality and good looks made the strong appeal of contrast to his own—and poor Adelaide's—melancholy hypochondria: the irritation, vaguely felt before, that so desirable a *fiancée* should waste herself on David King, recurred; and then there inserted itself the pleasing idea that here lay the way to settle old scores with the inheritor of the Grey Priory and that twenty thousand—naturally and properly Archibald's.

Whether, indeed, he knew for certain by the time Theo wrote to break off her engagement that he, Forrest, was going to ask her to marry him, is doubtful. But it is certain that Theo knew.

Directly the idea occurred to her—and it occurred almost as soon as they were thrown together at the rectory, as Miss Burchell had foretold—she played her cards with a promptness, calmness and resolution entirely admirable. When one evening, as she and Archibald were at chess in the rectory drawing-room after dinner, she said in rather a low voice, "Perhaps you will be surprised to hear, Mr. Forrest, I have broken off my engagement," and Forrest—astonished into forgetting a move, with his lean hand actually on a king—replied, for him, impulsively, "I am thankful to hear it!" she knew that she had not deceived herself.

There are as many ways of wooing as there are wooers, and not all require roses and nightingales. Forrest's courtship

took the form of a complete biography of his autumn cough, to which Theo—who had so few ailments herself that she usually found it difficult to believe other people had any—listened with a gracious sympathy.

Then they discovered a mutual dislike—based, indeed, on different grounds—of what Forrest called overpaying people; and a mutual detestation of Miss Burchell which remained one of their strongest bonds of sympathy through life.

As for Theo's heart and conscience, they were easily—if one may be allowed the expression—squared. As she had been able to convince herself that she was right to marry David King simply in order to do the better her Work for her Fellow-creatures, it was obviously easy to convince herself that it was right to break with King and marry his cousin for the sake of a position where she would be able to do much more good, and set, not only the moral tone of a village, but of a neighbourhood. And if she did not precisely love Archibald Forrest, neither had she precisely loved David King. The logic was flawless.

Mrs. Heywood, who had been deeply distressed by the breaking of her daughter's engagement with David—whom dear John had always liked—was far from guessing that Theo meant to marry Archibald. In her eyes, Forrest had long ceased to be of a marrying age; and for any man to think of a second wife when his first had not been dead a month, was surely sacrilege! So when she saw Forrest's thinly-covered head—not bald, as David had crudely stated—bending over Theo's dark one in the rectory drawing-room in earnest conversation, she was only charitably glad that he should find some easing of his grief.

Anstruther, when he left Inglethorpe to spend four days in town on a "business" whose nature he did not specify, and invited Mrs. Heywood and Theo to dine as often at the rectory as they could—"to keep that poor unhappy man company," says Anstruther looking quizzically at Mrs. Heywood—perceived that she saw nothing.

On his return this evening, he heard their voices in the drawing-room; and a quarter of an hour later—perfectly spruce and fresh, with the air of a man who is going to enjoy himself—he entered it. Dinner was announced almost immediately. As Anstruther gave his arm to Mrs. Heywood, he replied to Forrest's polite hope that his business had been satisfactorily settled with, "Oh! eminently to the satisfaction of the two chief people concerned—eminently!" and indulged in one of those mysterious chuckles some of his friends found so aggravating.

In the dining-room, Miss Heywood asked presently, "I suppose Miss Burchell and Nancy returned with you?" and, without waiting for an answer, added, "I must run down and see Nancy to-morrow. I am not going to let her slip out of the Reading Society!"

And Anstruther said, "No, I shouldn't! I shouldn't!" and again appeared to be enjoying himself.

When the wine was on the table and Theo had refused it with the air, as usual, of one who sets an example, Anstruther said, with the decanter still raised above her glass, "You'd better! Young women faint—don't they?—when they hear startling news, and I've brought some down with me!"

His three guests all turned and looked at him. Mrs. Heywood hoped that none of their friends were ill? Forrest, that the present Government had not brought any irretrievable disaster upon the country? Theo said nothing, but kept her eyes steadily on her host's face.

"The fact of the matter is," says Anstruther, looking back at her with more than a gleam of triumph in his own ("Why *should* I have spared her?" he said after, "*she* broke with King"), "I've been assisting at a wedding"—he sipped his wine—"David King and Nancy were married in London this morning." And he paused for his effect, as an actor after a telling speech.

Mrs. Heywood dropped her silver fork on her plate with

a clatter. "Nancy married to David!" she said. Then, looking at Theo, "Nancy!"

Forrest murmured something under his breath about the worst possible taste; and in a moment, when she had collected her forces, Miss Heywood turned to him—and, as it were, to the others through him—saying with a smiling tolerance which was really very well done:

"Well, we need not be so surprised, need we? It must have been obvious to us all that Nancy would have set her cap at David long ago—had he been free. They will make quite a nice little humdrum couple, and be perfectly happy, I am sure!"

Sarah Burchell was not the only person whom Theo's sublime condescensions aggravated into loss of temper.

"Why little, and why humdrum?" says Anstruther sharply. "Or do you simply mean that they are morally and intellectually your inferiors?"

That being exactly what Theo did mean, she turned a white shoulder upon her host, and in a voice of much dignity asked Mr. Forrest for the dish of plums. Mrs. Heywood, recovering speech after what had certainly been one of the greatest surprises of her life, required details of the wedding, and Forrest said something *sotto voce* to Theo.

When she and her mother presently reached the drawing-room, Theo soon silenced her mother's surmises and wonders by taking up a book, and with an elaborate, and, not wholly unsuccessful, attempt to appear exactly as usual, began to read. The light was waning: so presently she took the book to a distant chair by the window, and there read in silence, with an air of calm and profound absorption.

That David King would eventually decline on a lower range of feeling and marry some one else was a possibility which had, of course, occurred to her when it became her interest to break with him. That that person might possibly be Nancy Legard had also occurred to her; for if she had not divined where his heart tended, it had been because she

did not choose to divine—because to think he could look at Nancy when she, Theo, was his promised wife, was too gross a rebuff to vanity. But that the moment she set him free—the very moment—he should marry Nancy, without courtship or preliminary—thankfully, as if he had been longing and waiting for the chance to do it, with honour—was a rebuff far grosser. If she had been able to turn, not so much to him, as to Inglethorpe—her world—and say, “By all means! I shall myself be married to Mr. Archibald Forrest, and Inglethorpe Place, in three weeks’ time!” it would have been a different matter. But the mourning of those days was so rigidly long and severe that at least a year must elapse before she could become openly engaged: during that time, all the young women she had snubbed and patronised would be rejoicing to see her snubbed in her turn: while the ill-natured might well doubt if the “mutual consent” to the breaking of her engagement with King had not really meant that King had broken with her because he had preferred Nancy.

And she had done it all herself! She turned the leaf of her book—as the time had come when, if she had really been reading, it would have needed turning. It would have been so easy again to have postponed her marriage with King, and yet to have held him to his engagement until it was decorous to proclaim her own to Mr. Forrest! What a fool she had been—what a dreadful fool!—she, born and made so acute and clever!

When she felt Mrs. Heywood’s dear old orbs fixed—misty and mystified—on her face, she said, with a sharp and unusual irritation, “Is there anything you have to complain of, mama, in the way I have done my hair?”

And when Mrs. Heywood honestly replied, “I was not looking at your hair, my dear. I was just *wondering* about David and Nancy!” Theo returned, in a voice quite icily composed, “It is really no matter for wonder, as I said: I have been quite expecting the news myself,” which was as

near to a lie as Miss Heywood ever came—and that was in self-defence.

When the men came in from the dining-room, Anstruther—conscious of the tension in the air, and anxious to avoid at all hazards a second lapse into incivility to a guest in his house—proposed a rubber. It filled him with reluctant admiration to see how Miss Heywood—far from any mental distress causing her to trump her partner's best card or even to fail to return his lead—played her usual excellent game with her usual air of careless competence, so that at the end of the evening five and sixpence stood to her and Archibald's credit—a sum with which he was as delighted as if he really required it.

Despite shrubs still dripping and lawns oozing moisture, he proposed to Theo a turn in the garden; and while they were taking it—Forrest muffled like the hero of an Arctic expedition—Anstruther was able to convince Mrs. Heywood that, if everything was not already for the best in the best of worlds, it soon would be. As she could no more help looking on the sunny side of events than she could help growing stout (there is, indeed, much connection between the two), his task was easy. Yet he divined by the expression of her pondering old face that her simplicity was not deceived, and that she knew what Theo lacked.

Meanwhile, King and Nancy were on their way to those Southern lands where, when one is old and tired, one can re-capture for a little some of youth's delight in life, and where to be young and in love is very heaven.

In Nancy's memory, in long after years, there stood out her first sight of the Mediterranean—deeply and darkly blue—of the September sky above it also deeply blue, hot, cloudless; and of aromatic scents which reached the ship from the shore—those warm scents of flowers, trees, shrubs—the breath of the South.

Then memory kept with a clearness almost poignant cer-

tain days in particular—one, when they landed at a little Italian village; the white houses crowding up the hill; the vineyard full of grape-pickers, for it was the grape harvest; and the dim, green, misty olive-yard where she and David picnicked on grapes and the long roll of bread and the sour wine King had bought at the *albergo* on the quay: and from the grey shade saw the fierce heat of the noonday go by.

She remembered how strange it felt at first to have David always with her, and to be absorbed in him and by him; and how it grew upon her that, having seen him always handicapped and under a cloud, she had had no idea how confident and resolute he was—ay, how resolute to take his own way—never, for that worst of reasons, because it *was* his own way, but because he was sure it was the way which would make her happy.

As, indeed, she was neither a doll nor a fool, her reason as well as her heart had to be convinced: she had her own ideas and a spice of obstinacy to keep them, and, as David had always known, was warm of temper as well as of heart.

Nor did he find her—he had not expected to find her—the rare and ideal woman who refrains from asking questions in moments of urgency and difficulty; but he did find, before they were two days out, that she had fitted comfortably into her rôle on board, as she fitted into her place in his heart—as the corolla fits the flower.

As for himself, he was as perfectly happy as man can be. He had the work which Theo had grudged him; did it thoroughly with a quiet zest and a strong satisfaction in it; and then—loved as he had worked.

Of course, they had their dull moments and their disagreeing moments. But they could dare to disagree: the roots were firm.

They were away six months: returned to England for a week or two only, and were then away another six, repeat-

ing the same voyage—a dangerous thing to do, sentimentally—but the experiment was justified.

In all the happiness and sorrows of the years to come—the “mingled yarn” of our life, “good and ill together”—they had that perfect year of their youth to look back on—a possession for ever.

CHAPTER XXI

RIP VAN WINKLE

IF some Rip van Winkle had closed his eyes on Inglethorpe when King and Nancy were on their honeymoon, and had opened them some five or six years later, he would have seen that there, as everywhere, though people do not always get what they desire, more often than not they get what they are fit for, and what they have earned.

Peter Moor, for instance, married the daughter of a neighbouring farmer—a brisk, enterprising and very good-hearted young woman—who had settled to marry Peter the very first time she saw him and he attended her father's well-earned gout. The move was wholly a good one. She did not cure her husband's weakness, but she kept it in check; and as she was not at all squeamish, much in his habits which would have jarred and hurt, if not made Nancy entirely miserable, Mrs. Moor took as all in the day's work, did not worry Peter or herself on their score—or, indeed, on any score except the failure of Mrs. Archibald Forrest to call upon her. Miss Burchell called: and Nancy: and the Clutterbucks: but that was not enough: with the usual foolishness of women in such cases, Mrs. Peter gave Theo the satisfaction of seeing that the slight was felt, instead of ignoring and forgetting it and so rendering it ineffective. It was a grievance to her, too, that, even after the circumstances of the first Mrs. Forrest's death, old Graham was still preferred before Moor as medical attendant at Inglethorpe Place, though Moor himself was only amused, saying with a chuckle—as he drew a shocking old pipe from his pocket—"That young woman knows she'll get

as good as she gives from me, and she isn't going to risk it!" which was entirely the truth. For the rest, Peter was greatly fond of his stolid, rosy-cheeked pair of little girls; and it is the unromantic fact that in time he very nearly forgot that he had once been very much in love with Nancy, and deeply chagrined and despondent at her marriage with King. Nancy never forgot; but she knew Peter well, and she saw that he had.

Richard Anstruther remained rector of Inglethorpe till his death, and, if he was no Sydney Smith at Foston, also remained a capable, active and energetic parish priest; more worldly, Mrs. Archibald Forrest had been heard to say, than a clergyman should be, and certainly more worldly-wise than he generally is. Her efforts to goad him into greater spiritual and philanthropic activities he received in his old sarcastic manner; fixed on her that pair of gleaming eyes with, "Wouldn't you like to turn me out of the rectory now, Theo, and put in some little Mr. Meek of your own choosing, and run the parish from the Place?" which Theo *would* have liked very much—so she preserved the dignified silence which she still knew how to compass. She remained always a little surprised that, though she was now his most influential parishioner—influencing the most substantial cheque-book in Inglethorpe—he always kept his independence absolutely intact.

Presently, he was made rural dean, fed his fellow-clergy at the most hospitable of luncheon parties, and performed his other ruri-diaconal duties, as he performed all his duties, smartly and thoroughly. If it was, as Theo had said, only the outside of the cup and platter that he regarded, it must be owned they shone; but then, it was not.

His wife's death never left him free to form new ties, for she long survived him. That tragedy of his life remained written in the deep sombreness of his eyes in repose, for, except to Miss Burchell, he, who protested so loudly against

pinpricks, never spoke of it. For the rest, his life was not unhappy: he had his work, his garden, his roses, his horses and his money: regarded himself, as he said, as *in loco grandparentis* to Nancy's little boys, and presently kept a couple of Shetland ponies for them to ride about his fields. His grooms and gardeners always spoke of him as "a good master," which meant, and rightly means still on the lips of many simple people, not a kindly, benevolent, easy-going master, but one who rigidly insists upon the best work, and is not in the least afraid to punish bad.

On her return from London and Nancy's wedding, Sarah Burchell immediately set her house in order, and sternly sent at once to the Grey Priory, Nancy's harp, her baby chair with a bar across it, the dolls' house Anstruther had given her when she was a small creature, and all her other trifling possessions—the dumb things which speak with the human voice, and tug so fiercely at the heart-strings.

Then she proceeded to realise a project which had long simmered in her mind. After a couple of years' hard reading, she produced a handbook on French literature—not, indeed, the kind of book which makes the author conceited and the publisher rich, but a book which, in those days, supplied a gap in the libraries and, by attaining a real though modest success, proved that it was needed for profit or pleasure, and so justified its existence.

As it employed all her powers, it may be said that in writing it Sarah Burchell was happier than she had ever been in her life. Also, it brought grist to a mill greatly in need of it, and enabled her to take more than one long-dreamt-of trip to foreign climes—one of the best ways, as the traveller had always maintained, of spending money, since it buys a possession that cannot be broken or stolen, does not want dusting, and gives pleasure for the rest of one's life.

She had an abiding joy in Nancy's happiness and near-

ness; and in Nancy's little boys. But well as she loved them, and they her—for her dry, grim humour never affrighted them—she allowed herself no delusions. They were other people's children. Nancy used to have to complain that her aunt was an unsociable old icicle (the expression is Nancy's) and came much too seldom to the Grey Priory; and it is true that, with age, Miss Burchell, like Thoreau, developed "a perfect genius for staying at home."

"I don't believe it's all that stupid old book either," says Nancy, regarding her aunt meditatively. "It's some stupid old principle!"

And Miss Burchell replied, "My dear! If I were always with you I should interfere—for your good, of course! Whereas, you had much better take your own way, and find it's the wrong way—if it is the wrong way—and come back and start afresh. No use in 'helps'! 'Leave the neighbourhood' is the soundest motto for the elderly relatives of young married couples; and if they can't follow it, 'Don't leave your own house,' the next best. Of course the rule doesn't apply to Mrs. King. She's the ideal mother-in-law. Mrs. Heywood, now, would have been in the Priory kitchen, making the puddings. And as for the stupid old book, you haven't read it!"

"Bits, Sal!" says Nancy, not thinking of the book, and still looking meditatively at her aunt. "Truthfully, Sal, I've read bits of it!" Then she added, kissing Ralph on the top of his head in farewell, "Well, you've got this dear old boy"; and, in point of fact, Ralph, who had at first worried his great-aunt by his steady resistance to being washed and his constant insistence on being fed, had dogged his persistent way into her affections at last: declined to be transferred with Nancy to the Priory: of an evening, as Miss Burchell wrote or read, sat with his unhandsome head rubbing against her dress, and when she looked down, looked up with those appealing eyes, which said, "Grow old along

with me!—not quite, quite alone, if you can possibly help it!”

There was certainly one exception to Miss Burchell's unsociability, and that was in the case of Camilla King: their unlikely friendship grew closer with age: Miss Burchell always having, as she put it, a weakness for Camilla's gentleness of manner and yieldingness of disposition: while Mrs. King sighed openly for the perfect independence of mind and utter indifference to criticism which one could see in Miss Burchell's very shoes and shawl.

Those shoes took themselves on the wettest and forlornest of winter afternoons—for then Camilla would be the more likely to be nervous and solitary—to Ivy Chimneys: having replaced her old bonnet by a cap, the visitor started her plain sewing, punctuated Mrs. King's little rill of conversation with a shrewd nod here and there, and a shrewd glance above her spectacles; and sometimes she, who had usually so little use for *tendresses*, laid her rough, warm hand over Camilla's delicate little member.

Trudging home in the winter evening, Sarah Burchell congratulated herself that she should not live to see a time—if there ever is a time—when Camilla's type of woman will have been ruled out. Flowers, to be sure, only bloom and are sweet, yet it would be a dreary world without them. And, after all, Camilla was not only, as Miss Burchell had said, the ideal mother-in-law, who spoilt the grandsons and made them little garments, and merely commented on Nancy's nursery projects, “How clever you are, my love! I *wish* I had thought of that when Davie was a baby!”—but who, though she certainly had not “thought of that,” nor of any consecutive plan of education, seemed to have been, if one judged by results, a highly satisfactory mother.

Sarah Burchell had her hand on the latch of the door of Ferry Cottage, before it occurred to her that David had also had a father.

That other mother, Mrs. Heywood—fortunately carrying her comfort in her character—Theo's marriage with Forrest, and subsequently, their childlessness, had not the power to distress permanently. There remained to her, her perfect health, her house, her hospitalities, and that talent for benevolence she had bequeathed to a daughter who, indeed, disowned the parentage.

Soon after Theo's marriage, Canon Norman, spending a few days at Beech House, had ventured to express to Mrs. Heywood a certain distress that his godchild should have thrown over a poor man for a rich.

Mrs. Heywood, with her sweet face clouded a little, said, "Theo thought she would do more good in the parish as mistress of the Place."

When the Canon exclaimed, "My dear lady! young women don't marry to do good in a parish——"

Miss Burchell, who was a guest that evening, replied with spirit, "But, my dear sir! indeed we do! and for reasons much less worthy and comprehensible. Theo is suffering as much from other-worldliness as from worldliness, I can assure you!"

And Mrs. Heywood looked gratefully at Theo's old enemy, who was indeed amused to find herself in the rôle of Theo's defender.

One of the best points of Miss Heywood's excellent mind was that it worked exceedingly quickly. Before the evening was out, on which Anstruther sprang upon her (she knew he meant it to be a spring) the fact of David's marriage, she had decided she must go away from Inglethorpe until such time as, in her turn, she could startle it with her own engagement to Archibald Forrest. At breakfast next day, therefore, she recalled to Mrs. Heywood the undoubted fact that Aunt Emma had long been feeling injured at her (Theo's) constant refusal of her invitations to Bath: that she really felt a keen desire to inspect the historical monuments of

that interesting city, as also of adjacent Bristol; and that there is no time like the present. In less than a week, therefore, Mrs. and Miss Heywood and Louisa set out in a chaise painfully encompassed with luggage; and it was noticed (the village, as usual, noticing everything that happened, and very much that did not) that Mr. Forrest rode or drove daily into Dartford and there posted his correspondence.

Dear Emma disagreeing rather sharply with dear Betsy at the end of a month or so (an event Theodora's sensible eye had foreseen) she was perfectly ready with a plan for an autumnal driving tour in North Wales, and a winter in Devonshire. The spring was spent at Sidmouth, and in August, just one year after Adelaide Forrest's death, while King and Nancy were on their second honeymoon voyage, Theodora was quietly married in London to Archibald Forrest. Never deficient in taste, she had perceived, not only that pomps and vanities would be out of it, but that they were not, so to speak, needed, by one who would be the *châtelaine* of the Place and the wife of the richest man in Inglethorpe.

The wedding trip was brief: Theo was anxious to resume her work: she had allowed the Clothing Club, the Bible and School Classes, and all her other parochial activities, to lapse in her long absence—knowing that *remplaçantes* are generally either wholly and quickly unsatisfactory, or better than those they replace and very tenacious of office.

In a few weeks, she had all the strings in her hands again. By the winter, every little girl in the village was in a crimson cloak: the lanes were full of curtseys, gratifyingly deep; and perhaps the cloaks and the hot soup doled out from the kitchen of the Place did something to neutralise the icy cold of the ill-built and unrepaired cottages on Forrest's estate; and helped out those starvation wages on which his labourers—and the labourers of better men than he—did somehow keep body and soul together—till the Poor House claimed them at last.

Still, after all, it is pleasanter to most of us to give generously than to pay fairly. If the poor listened to Mrs. Forrest's advice, as they listen to most advice, with philosophic calm and without the slightest intention of allowing it to influence their conduct, now, as earlier, she did good by being good. Her visits brought an interest into dull lives, and the village grew to look for her of a morning, arrayed in a nunlike garb she had invented for the purpose—"a splendid renunciation of splendour"—and quite an effective contrast to the silky magnificence in which she rolled with Forrest in the barouche of an afternoon and, as Sarah Burchell remarked, with a slight closing of the right eye, was "County, while we are not!"

In her own social sphere, Mrs. Forrest certainly cultivated what are called the right people, snubbed the wrong with great stateliness, and patronised or denied her patronage to certain doubtfuls—such as Mrs. Peter Moor—with absolutely decisive results on their social standing. This power did not decrease her vanity. She was invited to become, and became, President of the newly started Ladies' Toxophilite Society: one of the season's Bow Meetings was annually held at Inglethorpe Place; and though Mrs. Archibald Forrest, as Lady Paramount in green and gold, could shoot no better than she had shot as Miss Heywood at the Priory, she had, as there, the air of being quite first-rate—with the proud consciousness of the Paramouncy, and of Inglethorpe Place, added.

One winter, she inaugurated a series of Shakespeare Readings—the county attending more or less reluctantly, and bribed by the supper to follow; for in those times no one had any notion of a feast of reason unaccompanied by a more practical feast of a greedier description. Mr. and Mrs. Forrest also gave periodically stately dinner-parties, as it was fitting they should, at which the elderly gentleman to the right and left of the hostess forgave her the superiority of

her mind and manner for the sake of her good looks and the excellent dinner with which she provided them.

For she must indeed be a fool who does not learn from one humiliation to avoid another.

Adelaide Forrest's old servants, who began by being rather afraid of their new, austere young mistress, soon found the austere young mistress was afraid of them, or, rather, afraid of losing them (which is the same thing): since she meant to devote herself to work outside her home, there must obviously be some one to do hers in it; and Forrest not only allowed himself to be irritated by trifles, but positively laid himself out to be. So, by dint of being to their virtues very kind and to their faults a little blind, Mrs. Forrest managed to retain not only the services of the old housekeeper and the cook but of the sleek Channing, who always knew the whereabouts of his master's dinner-pills, and the precise angle at which his hat and neck-shawl were to be laid out on the hall table.

Few things became Theo better than the philosophy with which she bore her husband's fidgettiness. Assisted by those admirable nerves—known as none—she constantly and patiently rose to exclude what she called air and he called draughts (as she had felt no duty to do in the case of Mrs. King): checked her inborn untidiness: somehow managed, by the skin of her teeth, to be almost in time for meals: while, at them, she sent stately messages downstairs that sugar or salt—or whatever else Forrest fancied disagreed with him at the moment—should be excluded from the dishes—in brief, humoured him to the top of his bent, where a woman who really loved him must certainly have fought and defied him.

The visitor to that great house no longer felt as one who treads alone some banquet-hall deserted: Theo had galvanised it into life: brought always in her wake vigour, plans and purpose—all respectable things—imparted even a certain sensation of crowds and bustle, to which Forrest resigned

himself so soon as he found he was not to be hustled personally and his own apartments were left inviolate.

He became indeed vicariously proud of his wife's good deeds—when he was certain they were not going to interfere with his own comfort; and at parties, where he had formerly been heard dismally boasting of poor Adelaide's delicacy, such fragments of speech as "marvellous constitution"—"positively indefatigable"—"two committee meetings and her parish rounds"—now floated in his atmosphere.

Presently, he might be seen following his wife on to public platforms: she gravitated thereto as naturally as the bee to the flower when there were not many women innovating enough to appear on them; and as, when they did, public opinion still, like St. Paul, required them to keep silence, it was Forrest who, in a few well-chosen words (really well-chosen, for it was not his intellect that was the mean part of him), introduced to the audience the charity in which his wife was interested—sometimes turning to her for the confirmation of this or that statement, and thus drawing upon her scores of admiring or envious eyes.

David King, certainly, would far rather have risked his life than a speech; while as for tactfully bringing into the limelight a wife, really longing for it, but obliged to pretend she desired nothing better than the background, he was too stupid even to have thought of it. Theo was never more convinced than upon such occasions that she had chosen well.

Her temperament cheated her, as her husband's cheated him, out of any desire for a deeper relationship. As the larger part of his money would revert on his death to his first wife's relations, there was no troublesome necessity for an heir: so he had for life the enjoyment of his fortune, his misfortunes and his health, and Theo had always the Work whose importance she rated higher and higher.

When Laura Clutterbuck, blushing purple to the very backs of her fat arms, visible through their muslin sleeves, broke to her that, in lieu of being her aide-de-camp in the

parish, she was to become the Dartford curate's wife, and it presently became evident was not marrying him for what Mrs. Archibald Forrest spoke of as a new Sphere of Influence but for his perfectly insignificant self, Theo's patronising condescension towards this manifestly inferior creature was a wonderful thing. While her attitude towards another "little humdrum couple," whose marriage had been a great blow to her pride, had in it, not unnaturally perhaps, a certain element of jealous hostility.

The French novelist always begins where the English one used to leave off; and the Frenchman is right, no doubt, since marriage is nearly always a start and not a finish.

Still, the really happy marriage has as a rule no history; or only a very little.

Three parts of King's time were spent at sea in that plain work which remained all his life its justification, its pride and one of the great sources of its contentment.

Once, when he had been home for a month or two and was leaving again, Nancy said to her aunt, with a half sigh, "David is always sorry to go back, but he is not sorry to *have* to go back!" which defined the case exactly. Yet, not the less, it was the life he had left at the Grey Priory which filled all his heart—though indeed not always all his thoughts—at sea; and no one who ever saw the deep delight in his tanned face and his steady eyes when the time came for him to return to Nancy and, presently, their two little boys, could have doubted that here was that rare thing, an almost perfect satisfaction.

The first few hours of the homecoming were among the flawless ones of life.

To-morrow there would be necessary business in house and grounds to be seen to and plans discussed: it would have to be settled when little Charles must begin lessons, and the best method of getting ahead of little Henry's quick temper ("Mine!" says Nancy, "I recognise the symptoms"). But

to-night, the children were pure delight: the old house was simply home—and perfect; and when, after dinner, they strolled in the garden under the calm evening sky, and Nancy put her arm through David's so that she could press it at will and know he was real flesh and blood—hers, here and now—they did not need to talk. Often, indeed, complete silence fell between them, unbroken except by the lap, lap of the river on the shore—the river that bore ships and men to their destiny, the sea. As they stood watching it, Nancy laid her cheek close against King's shoulder, and, half-unconsciously, the prayer of all lovers rose in her heart:

“Let fate reach me how she likes
If you'll not die!”

Yet, even so, they would have known exquisite things.

Then, “when the eve” had “its last streak and the night its first star,” they turned housewards; began talking a little on ordinary subjects; only half attending to their own words.

Nearly always, of course, it was King's duty on his home-coming to excite Nancy to greater sternness of heart: she was inclined to think—and when Nancy inclined to think she remained all her life inclined to say, with considerable spirit—that he was too strict a disciplinarian with the little boys. King-like, he remained one: “We daren't be weak,” he said, “that's fatal!”

He was, indeed, what, with a sigh, she sometimes called “bracing,” even with her; but he was also so unselfish he would have made any woman selfish, less prone to the failing than she.

His conduct of Uncle Charles' bequest—the little estate, its servants and tenants—was marked with the directness, simplicity and swiftness of action he had learnt in his profession: it never seemed to worry him: it was always well-conducted: the good workers—well paid and disciplined—liked to stay; and the bad hurried away—lest they should be made good in spite of themselves; for in King's long ab-

sences Nancy was as practical and efficient as he was himself.

"You owe that to me," says Sarah Burchell, "I've made her business-like and left her feminine. That's an achievement."

"I owe—a lot—to you," says King, whose density on certain points Nancy had enlightened; and Sarah Burchell, not ill-pleased, wagged her head until the curls on her brown front shook.

But if she was satisfied with the Grey Priory and its inmates, not so every one.

"Ce que le monde vous pardonne le moins, c'est de vous passer de lui"; and the independence the frequent refusal of invitations implies was naturally galling to Mrs. Archibald Forrest's temperament; and particularly galling when she found it in King and his wife.

It is true, indeed, that with so many old friends and near relatives in the village—and some who were both the one and the other—Nancy, and King when he was at home, were not likely to be recluses. Mr. Gilmour and his carpet-bag now and again appeared for a brief visit at the Priory: Miss King came twice for long ones before she died: while old Captain MacCulloch spent a week, agonisingly embarrassing to him at the time, but to be thoroughly enjoyed when he was safely home again for ever and ever.

Still, despite these facts, King and Nancy, having their own lives to lead, were chiefly employed in leading them: Nancy was but a frail support to Theo's parochial activities, and before long had altogether faded away from the Reading Society: while to behold Mrs. Archibald speeding at an early hour up the drive of the Grey Priory was the signal for Mrs. David to recall all her reasons for staying at home—or the excuses which sounded most like them.

All through a certain December day, after Theo had made one such purposeful morning call, a slight cloud was on Nancy's eyes and heart. After dinner, when she and David

had been upstairs to see the little boys asleep and had returned to the drawing-room, she sang a little, then came and sat—a favourite attitude—on the hearth with her back against King's knees and her eyes watching the fire. It burnt frostily: the pretty room was more than ordinarily pretty and comfortable of a winter evening, with the thick curtains (Uncle Charles' mother had worked their handsome borders) drawn across the windows; and, all about it, things not certainly always beautiful in themselves but dear for their associations, with history or memory in them.

Presently, King put down his book, touched Nancy's cheek lightly with his forefinger, and, bending over her, said, "Well, ma'am, what is it?"

Nancy drew a long breath.

"Theo nearly insisted on our being at the Shakespeare Reading to-night," she said. "She was not at all pleased when I said we really *couldn't* spare one of our last three evenings"—King was leaving for Southern Spain—"she is always saying, you know, we don't appreciate the social claims our equals and inferiors have on us, and that our duties cannot be narrowed to our own homes; and sometimes, I do wonder myself if she isn't right, and if all this"—and Nancy leant her head back against King's knee—"and all that"—and she pointed to the nursery above them—"isn't rather selfish, as she thinks!"

If Nancy, womanlike, found it difficult to be generous to Theo, King estimated her with the impartiality of a disinterested—almost of an uninterested—judge; and was as fair to her excellencies as he was clear and sure she had—confused her values.

"Why, what nonsense, of course it isn't!" he said, with a laugh. "I'm perfectly sure people go out to parties because they are dull themselves, not because they are afraid some one else will be; and most of them do not 'narrow their duties to their own homes' simply because they would rather do any business than their own, or else haven't enough

of their own to do. Look round you, and Nature will tell you that you were put in the world to be what you are, and that Theo was put in the world to be what she isn't! All the classes and charities and cultivating old Clutterbuck's mind with Hamlet are beside the mark. Theo married on purpose to do them—so let her do them! They may do some good; but not a thousandth part of the good you will do by bringing up the boys to be men and do their work as men—and by keeping me—out of mischief!"

He laughed; stroked her cheek; and she reached up and took his hand and laid her face upon it.

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